

# English Men of Letters

EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

# GRAY

BY

EDMUND W. GOSSE



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## ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

As a biographical study, this little volume differs in one important respect from its predecessors in this series. Expansion, instead of compression, has had to be my method in treating the existing lives of Gray. Of these none have hitherto been published except in connexion with some part of his works, and none has attempted to go at all into detail. Mitford's, which is the fullest, would occupy, in its purely biographical section, not more than thirty of these pages.

The materials I have used are chiefly taken from the following sources:

I. The *Life and Letters of Gray*, edited by Mason in 1774. This work consists of a very meagre thread of biography connecting a collection of letters, which would be more valuable, if Mason had not tampered with them, altering, omitting, and re-dating at his own free will.

II. Mitford's *Life of Thomas Gray*, prefixed to the 1814 edition of the *Poems*. This is very valuable so far as it goes. The Rev. John Mitford was a young clergyman, who was born ten years after the death of Gray, and who made it the business of his life to collect from such survivors as remembered Gray all the documents and anecdotes that he could secure. This is the life which was altered and enlarged, to be prefixed to the Eton Gray, in 1845.



III. Mitford's edition of the *Works* of Gray, published in 4 vols., in 1836. This contained the genuine text of most of the letters printed by Mason, and a large number which now saw the light for the first time, addressed to Wharton, Chute, Nichols, and others.

IV. Correspondence and Reminiscences of the Rev. Norton Nichols, edited by Mitford, in 1843.

V. The *Correspondence of Gray and Mason*, to which are added other letters, not before printed, an exceedingly valuable collection, not widely enough known, which was published by Mitford in 1853.

VI. The *Works* of Gray, as edited in 2 vols. by Mathias, in 1814; this is the only publication in which the Pembroke MSS. have hitherto been made use of.

VII. *Souvenirs de C. V. de Bonstetten*, 1832.

VIII. The Correspondence of Horace Walpole.

IX. Gray's and Stonehewer's MSS., as preserved in Pembroke College, Cambridge.

X. MS. Notes and Letters by Gray, Cole, and others, in the British Museum.

By far the best account of Gray, not written by a personal friend, is the brief summary of his character and genius contributed by Mr. Matthew Arnold to "The English Poets."

No really good or tolerably full edition of Gray's *Works* is in existence. Neither his English nor his Latin Poems have been edited in any collection which is even approximately complete; and his Letters, although they are better given by Mitford than by Mason, are very far from being in a satisfactory condition. In many of them the date is wrongly printed; and some, which bear no date, are found, by internal evidence, to be incorrectly attributed by Mitford. No attempt has ever been made to collect

Gray's writings into one single publication. I am sorry to say that all my efforts to obtain a sight of Gray's unpublished letters and facetious poems, many of which were sold at Sotheby & Wilkinson's on the 4th of August, 1854, have failed. On the other hand, the examination of the Pembroke MSS. has supplied me with a considerable amount of very exact and important biographical information which has never seen the light until now.

I have to express my warmest thanks to the Master and Fellows of Pembroke College, Cambridge, who permitted me to examine these invaluable MSS.; to Mr. R. A. Neil, of Pembroke, and Mr. J. W. Clark, of Trinity, whose kindness in examining archives, and copying documents for me, has been great; to Mr. R. T. Turner, who has placed his Gray MSS. at my disposal; to Professor Sidney Colvin and Mr. Basil Champneys, who have given me the benefit of their advice on those points of art and architecture which are essential to a study of Gray; and to Mr. Edward Scott and Mr. Richard Garnett, for valuable assistance in the Library of the British Museum. For much help in forming an idea of the world in which Gray moved, I am indebted to Mr. Christopher Wordsworth's books on Cambridge in the eighteenth century.

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# GRAY.

## CHAPTER I.

### CHILDHOOD AND EARLY COLLEGE LIFE.

THOMAS GRAY was born at his father's house in Cornhill, on the 26th of December, 1716. Of his ancestry nothing is known. Late in life, when he was a famous poet, Baron Gray of Gray in Forfarshire claimed him as a relation, but with characteristic serenity he put the suggestion from him. "I know no pretence," he said to Beattie, "that I have to the honour Lord Gray is pleased to do me; but if his lordship chooses to own me, it certainly is not my business to deny it." The only proof of his connexion with this ancient family is that he possessed a bloodstone seal, which had belonged to his father, engraved with Lord Gray's arms, gules a lion rampant, within a bordure engrailed argent. These have been accepted at Pembroke College as the poet's arms, but as a matter of fact we may say that he sprang on both sides from the lower-middle classes. His paternal grandfather had been a successful merchant, and died leaving Philip, apparently his only son, a fortune of 10,000*l*. Through various vicissitudes this money passed, at length almost reaching the poet's

hands in no very much diminished quantity, for Gray seems to have been as clever in business as his father was extravagant. He was born in 1676. Towards his twentieth year he married Miss Dorothy Antrobus, a Berkshire lady, about twenty years of age, who, with her sister Mary, a young woman three years her senior, kept a milliner's shop in the City. They belonged, however, to a genteel family, for the remaining sister, Anna, was the wife of a prosperous country lawyer, Mr. Jonathan Rymer, and the two brothers, Robert and John Antrobus, were fellows of Cambridge colleges, and afterwards tutors at Eton. These five persons take a prominent place in the subsequent life of the poet, whereas he never mentions any of the Grays. His father had certainly one daughter, Mrs. Oliffe, a woman of violent temper, who married a gentleman of Norfolk, and was well out of the world after the death of Gray's mother, when she began to haunt him, and only died two or three months before he did. She seems to have resembled Philip Gray in her character, for the poet, always singularly respectful and obedient to his other elderly relations, calls her "the spiteful Cerberus upon the Dragon of Wantley."

Dorothy Gray was unfortunate in her married life. Her husband was violent, jealous, and probably mad. Of her twelve children, Thomas was the only one who survived, but reared, but Mason is doubtless wrong in saying that the eleven who died were all suffocated by infantile convulsions. Mrs. Gray speaks in her "case" of the expense of providing "all manner of apparel for her children." Thomas, however, certainly would have died as an infant, but that his mother, finding him in a fit, opened his veins with her scissors, by that means relieving the detention of blood to the brain. His father neglected him

he was brought up by his mother and his aunt Mary. He also mentions with touching affection, in speaking of the death of a Mrs. Bonfoy in 1763, that "she taught me to pray." Home life at Cornhill was rendered miserable by the cruelties of the father, and it seems that the boy's uncle, Robert Antrobus, took him away to his own house at Burnham, in Bucks. This gentleman was a fellow of Peterhouse, as his younger brother Thomas was of King's College, Cambridge. With Robert the boy studied botany, and became learned, according to Horace Walpole, in the virtues of herbs and simples. Unfortunately, this uncle died on January 23, 1729, at the age of fifty; there still exists a copy of *Waller's Poems* in which Gray has written his own name, with this date; perhaps it was an heirloom of his uncle.

In one of Philip Gray's fits of extravagance he seems to have had a full-length of his son painted, about this time, by the fashionable portrait-painter of the day, Jonathan Richardson the elder. This picture is now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, at Cambridge. The head is good in colour and modelling; a broad, pale brow, sharp nose and chin, large eyes, and a pert expression give a lively idea of the precocious and not very healthy young gentleman of thirteen. He is dressed in a blue satin coat, lined with pale shot silk, and crosses his stockinged legs so as to display dapper slippers of russet leather. His father, however, absolutely refused to educate him, and he was sent to Eton, about 1727, under the auspices of his uncles, and at the expense of his mother. On the 26th of April of the same year, a smart child of ten, with the airs of a little dancing-master, a child who was son of a prime-minister, and had kissed the King's hand, entered the same school; and some intellectual impulse brought them to-

gether directly in a friendship that was to last, with short interval, until the death of one of them more than forty years afterwards.

It is not certain that Horace Walpole at once adopted that attitude of frivolous worship which he preserved towards Gray in later life. He was a brilliant little social meteor at Eton, and Gray was probably attracted first to him. Yet it was characteristic of the poet throughout his life that he had always to be sought, and even at Eton his talents may have attracted Walpole's notice. At a later date, events, they became fast friends, and fostered in one another intellectual pretensions of an alarming nature. Both were oppidans and not collegers, and therefore it is difficult to trace them minutely at Eton. But we know that they "never made an expedition against bargemen, or won a match at cricket," for this Walpole confesses; but they wandered through the playing-fields at Eton tending a visionary flock, and "sighing out some pastoral name to the echo of the cascade under the bridge" which spans the Chalvey Brook. An avenue of limes amongst the elms is still named the "Poet's Walk," and is connected by tradition with Gray. They were a pair of weakly little boys, and in these days of brisk athletic training would hardly be allowed to exist. Another amiable and gentle boy, still more ailing than themselves, was early drawn to them by sympathy: this was Richard West, a few months younger than Gray and older than Walpole, a son of the Richard West who was made Lord Chancellor of Ireland when he was only thirty-five, and who then immediately died; his mother's father, dead before young Richard's birth, had been the famous Bishop Gilbert Burnet. A fourth friend was Thomas Ashton, who soon slips out of our history, but who survived until 1775.



"Say, Father Thames, for thou hast seen  
 Full many a sprightly race,  
 Disporting on thy margent green,  
 The paths of pleasure trace;  
 Who foremost now delights to cleave,  
 With pliant arm, thy glassy wave;  
 The captive linnet which enthral?  
 What idle progeny succeed  
 To chase the rolling circle's speed,  
 Or urge the flying ball?"

But we have every reason to believe that he more amply occupied in helping "grateful S. adore" her Henry's holy shade." Learning was preferred to athletics at our public schools, and naturally drawn by temperament to study. It has been understood that he versified at Eton, but the lines of his which have hitherto been known are of 1736, when he had been nearly two years at Oriel. I have, however, been fortunate enough to find MSS. in Pembroke College a "play-exercise at the poet's handwriting, which has never been printed, which is valuable as showing us the early ripening of his scholarship. It is a theme, in seventy-three verses, commencing with the line—

"Pendet Homo incertus gemini ad confinia mundi

The normal mood of man is described as oscillation between the things of Heaven and the Earth; he assumes that all nature is made for his comfort, but soon experience steps in and proves the contrary: he endeavours to fathom the laws

superhuman power and accomplishment, only to discover the narrow scope of his possibilities, and he has at last to curb his ambition, and be contented with what God and nature have ordained. The thoughts are beyond a boy, though borrowed in the main from Horace and Pope; while the verse is still more remarkable, being singularly pure and sonorous, though studded, in boyish fashion, with numerous tags from Virgil. What is really noticeable about this early effusion is the curious way in which it prefigures its author's maturer moral and elegiac manner; we see the writer's bias and the mode in which he will approach ethical questions, and we detect in this little "play-exercise" a shadow of the stately didactic reverie of the *Odes*. As this poem has never been described, I may be permitted to quote a few of the verses:

"Plurimus (hic error, demensque libido lacessit)  
In superos cœlumque ruit, sedesque relinquit,  
Quas natura dedit proprias, jussitque tueri.  
Humani sortem generis pars altera luget,  
Invidet armento, et campi sibi vindicat herbam.  
O quis me in pecoris felicia transferet arva,  
In loca pastorum deserta, atque otia dia?  
Cur mihi non Lyncisne oculi, vel odora canum vis  
Additur, aut gressus cursu glomerare potestas?  
Aspice ubi, teneres dum texit aranea casses,  
Funditur in telam, et late per stamina vivit!  
Quid mihi non tactus eadem exquisita facultas  
Taurorumve tori solidi, pennæve volucrum."

In the face of such lines as these, and bearing in mind Walpole's assertion that "Gray never was a boy," we may

college which has since adopted him as her type, and which now presents to each emerging pupil some selection from the works of the Etonian *lence*, Thomas Gray.

In 1734 the quadruple alliance broke up. probably Ashton, proceeded to Cambridge, where he was for a short time a pensioner of Pembroke but went over, on the 3d of July, as a fellow-commoner to his uncle Antrobus's college, Peterhouse.<sup>1</sup> Walpole came up to London for the winter, and did not make his appearance at King's College, Cambridge, until March. West, meanwhile, had been isolated from his friends, being sent to Oxford, where he entered Christ Church much against his will. For a year the young men's quarters are absolutely lost to sight. If they were in another, their letters are missing, and the correspondence of Walpole and of Gray with West begins in November, 1735.

But in the early part of that year a very striking incident occurred in the Gray family, an incident perfectly unknown until, in 1807, a friend of Hume happened to discover, in a volume of MS. law-cases submitted by Mrs. Dorothy Gray to the eminent John Audley, in February, 1735. In this extensive document the poet's mother states that for nearly years, that is to say, for the whole of her marriage

<sup>1</sup> The Master of Peterhouse has kindly copied for me the register of admissions at that college, this entry, hitherto "Jul: 3<sup>to</sup>. 1734. Thomas Gray Middlesexiensis in schola Etonensi institutus, annosque natus 18 (petente Tutore

has received no support from her husband, but has depended entirely on the receipts of the shop kept by herself and her sister; moreover "almost providing everything for her son whilst at Eton school, and now he is at Peter-House in Cambridge."

"Notwithstanding which, almost ever since he (her husband) hath been married, he hath used her in the most inhuman manner, by beating, kicking, punching, and with the most vile and abusive language, that she hath been in the utmost fear and danger of her life, and hath been obliged this last year to quit her bed, and lie with her sister. This she was resolved, if possible, to bear; not to leave her shop of trade for the sake of her son, to be able to assist in the maintenance of him at the University, since his father won't."

Mrs. Gray goes on to state that her husband has an insane jealousy of all the world, and even of her brother, Thomas Antrobus, and that he constantly threatens "to ruin himself to undo her and his only son," having now gone so far as to give Mary Antrobus notice to quit the shop in Cornhill at Midsummer next. If he carries out this threat, Mrs. Gray says that she must go with her sister, to help her "in the said trade, for her own and her son's support." She asks legal counsel which way will be best "for her to conduct herself in this unhappy circumstance." Mr. Audley writes sympathetically from Doctors Commons, but civilly and kindly tells her that she can find no protection in the English law.

This strange and tantalising document, the genuineness of which has never been disputed, is surrounded by difficulties to a biographer. The known wealth and occa-

These four boys formed a "quadruple alliance" of the warmest friendship. West seemed the genius amongst them; he was a nervous and precocious lad, who made verses in his sleep, cultivated not only a public Latin muse, but also a private English one, and dazzled his companions by the ease and fluency of his pen. His poetical remains—to which we shall presently return, since they are intimately connected with the development of Gray's genius—are of sufficient merit to permit us to believe that had he lived he might have achieved a reputation amongst the minor poets of his age. Neither Shenstone nor Beattie had written anything so considerable when they reached the age at which West died. His character was extremely winning, and in his correspondence with Gray, as far as it has been preserved, we find him at first the more serious and the more affectionate friend. But the symptoms of his illness, which seem to have closely resembled those of Keats, destroyed the superficial sweetness of his nature, and towards the end we find Gray the more sober and the more manly of the two.

Besides the inner circle of Walpole, West, and Ashton, there was an outer ring of Eton friends, whose names have been preserved in connexion with Gray's. Amongst these was George Montagu, grandnephew of the great Earl of Halifax; Storchewer, a very firm and loyal friend, with whom Gray's intimacy deepened to the end of his life; Clarke, afterwards a fashionable physician at Epsom; and Jacob Bryant, the antiquary, whose place in class was next to Gray's through one term. With these he doubtless shared those delights of swimming, birds'-nesting, hoops, and trap-ball which he has described, in ornate eighteenth-century fashion, in the famous stanza of his Eton Ode:

of her and of his son. That there is not one word of family troubles in Gray's copious correspondence what we might expect from so proud and reticent a nature. But the gossipy Walpole must have known that Gray and Mason need not have been so excessively distressed when all concerned had long been dead. Perhaps Gray exaggerated a little, and perhaps also the conduct of her husband's behaviour in 1735 made her feel that in earlier years they had lived on gentler terms. In the events, the money-scrivener is shown to have been violent, and, as I have before conjectured, probably insane. The interesting point in the whole story is Gray's self-sacrifice for her son, a devotion which in his turn repaid with passionate attachment, and which he remembered with tender effusion to the day of his death. He inherited from his mother his power of enduring in quiet rectitude, his capacity for suffering in silence, and the singular tenacity of his affections.

Gray, Ashton, and Horace Walpole were at Cambridge together as undergraduates from the spring of 1737 to the winter of 1738. They associated very much with one another, and Walpole shone rather less, it would seem, than at any other part of his life. The following is an extract of a letter from Walpole to West, dated November 1738, which is particularly valuable :

"Tydeus rose and set at Eton. He is only known here as a scholar of King's. Orosmandes and Almanzor are just the same; that is, I am almost the only person they are acquainted with, and consequently the only person acquainted with their names."

The nickname which gives us least difficulty here is that in which we are most interested. Orosmales was West's name for Gray, because he was such a chilly mortal, and worshipped the sun. West himself was known as Favonius. Tydeus is very clearly Walpole himself, and Almanzor is probably Ashton. I would hazard the conjecture that Plato is Henry Coventry, a young man then making some stir in the University with certain semi-religious *Dialogues*. He was a friend of Ashton's, and produced on Horace Walpole a very startling impression, causing in that volatile creature for the first and only time an access of fervent piety, during which Horace actually went to read the Bible to the prisoners in the Castle gaol. Very soon this wore off, and Coventry himself became a free-thinker, but Ashton remained serious, and taking orders very early, dropped out of the circle of friends. In all this the name of Gray is not mentioned, but one is justified in believing that he did not join the reading-parties at the Castle.

Early in 1736 the three Cambridge undergraduates appeared in print simultaneously and for the first time in a folio collection of Latin *Hymeneals* on the marriage of Frederic, Prince of Wales. Of these effusions, Gray's copy of hexameters is by far the best, and was so recognized from the first. Mason has thought it necessary to make a curious apology for this poem, and says that Gray "ought to have been above prostituting his powers" in "adulatory verses of this kind." But if he had glanced through the lines again, of which he must have been speaking from memory, Mason would have seen that they

deal about his own fine language, and is void of anything like adulation. The verses do not show much progress; there is a fine period, but it is almost a cento from Ovid. (C) melancholy to relate, does not scan. In every allusion to the *Hymeneal* is *Luna Habitabilis*, a poem of one hundred verses, written by desire of the University, 1737, and printed in the *Musæ Etonenses*. It is possible to lay any stress on these official productions as exercises on a given text. At Pembroke, in the library of the College, and in the Stonchouse, the Master's lodge, I have examined a number of pieces, in prose and verse, copied in a rough handwriting, and signed "Gray." Among these are several of elegiacs, on the 5th of November, struck remarkably clever, and it might be well, as the bulk of his works is so small, and his Latin verse so good, to include several of these in a complete edition of his writings. They do not, however, greatly concern us.

As early as May, 1736, it is curious to find that at Cambridge already lying with a leaden weight on the nerves and energies of Gray, a youth scarcely in his twentieth year. In his letters to West he strikes the same note that he harped upon ten years later to Norton, twenty years later to Mason, thirty years later to Norton Nichols, and in his last months, with more insistence than ever, to Bonstetten. The clouds gathered upon his spirits. He writes to West: "What it will be my greatest of pleasures to know what you read, and how you spend your time."



nothing is a most amusing business ; and yet *neither something nor nothing gives me any pleasure*. When you have seen one of my days, you have seen a whole year of my life ; they go round and round like the blind horse in the mill, only he has the satisfaction of fancying he makes a progress and gets some ground ; my eyes are open enough to see the same dull prospect, and to know that, having made four-and-twenty steps more, I shall be just where I was." This is the real Gray speaking to us for the first time, and after a few more playful phrases he turns again, and gives us another phase of his character. "You need not doubt, therefore, of having a first row in the front box of my little heart, and I believe you are not in danger of being crowded there ; it is asking you to an old play, indeed, but you will be candid enough to excuse the whole piece for the sake of a few tolerable lines." Many clever and delicate boys think it effective to pose as victims to melancholy, and the former of these passages would possess no importance if it were not for its relation to the poet's later expressions. He never henceforward habitually rose above this deadly dulness of the spirits. His melancholy was passive and under control, not acute and rebellious, like that of Cowper, but it was almost more enduring. It is probable that with judicious medical treatment it might have been removed, or so far relieved as to be harmless. But it was not the habit of men in the first half of the eighteenth century to take any rational care of their health. Men who lived in the country, and did not hunt, took no exercise at all. The constitution of the genera-

early middle life. People were not in the least healthy when men like Garth and Fenton died of mere indolence because they had become prematurely corpulent and could not be persuaded to get out of bed. Swift and Gray are illustrious examples of the neglect of every hygienic precaution among quiet middle-class people in the early decades of the century. Gray took no exercise whatever; Cole reports that he said at the end of his life that he had never thrown his leg across the back of a horse, and this was really a very extraordinary feat for a man to make in those days. But we shall not return to the subject of Gray's melancholy, and shall not dwell upon it here, further than to note that he was not at least with his undergraduate days. He was not effeminate at college, but the only proof of his effeminacy given to us is one with which the most robust and healthy reader must sympathise, namely, that he drank no breakfast, whilst all the rest of the university did. Horace Walpole, drank beer.

The letter from which we have just quoted shows that the idleness of his life existed only in the early part of his life. He was, in fact, at this time wandering along the less-trodden paths of Latin literature, and was idly laying the foundation of his unequalled knowledge of the classics. He is now reading Statius, and he encloses a translation of about a hundred and ten lines from the sixth book of the *Thebais*. This is the first example of his English verse which has been preserved. It is very interesting, as showing the happy instinct which led Gray to reject the more effeminate in favour of the more massive and sonorous.

To a trained ear, after much study of minor English verse written between 1720 and 1740, these couplets have almost an archaic sound, so thoroughly are they out of keeping with the glib, satiric poetry of the period. Pope was a splendid artificer of verse, but there was so much of pure intellect, and of personal temperament, in the conduct of his art, that he could not pass on his secret to his pupils, and in the hands of his direct imitators the heroic couplet lost every charm but that of mere sparkling progress. The verse of such people as Whitehead had become a simple voluntary upon knitting-needles. Gray saw the necessity of bringing back melody and volume to the heroic line, and very soon the practice of the day disgusted him, as we shall see, with the couplet altogether. For the present he was learning the principles of his art at the feet of Dryden. West was delighted with the translation, and compared Gray contending with Statius to Apollo wrestling with Hyacinth. In a less hyperbolic spirit, he pointed out, very justly, the excellent rendering of that peculiarly Statian phrase, *Summos auro mansueverat unguis*, by

“And calm’d the terrors of his claws in gold.”

We find from Walpole that Gray spent his vacations in August, 1736, at his uncle’s house at Burnham, in Buckinghamshire; and here he was close to the scene of so many of his later experiences, the sylvan parish of Stoke-Pogis. For the present, however, all we hear is that he is too lazy to go over to Eton, which the enthusiastic Walpole and West consider to be perfectly unpardonable.

"My uncle is a great hunter in imagination; he sits in every chair in the house, so I am forced to stand at the door, and though the gout forbids him galloping into the field, yet he continues still to regale his ears and nose with the most comfortable noise and stink. He holds me mighty cheap, and walks when I should ride, and reads when I should be at my comfort amidst all this is, that I have at the distance of a green lane, a forest (the vulgar call it a wood), at least, as good as so, for I spy no human thing but myself. It is a little chaos of mountains and precipices, but it is true, that do not ascend much above the clouds, nor are the cliffs quite so amazing as Dover Cliff; but just such a place as people who love their necks as well as I do may venture to climb. The crags that give the eye as much pleasure as if they were dangerous. Both vale and hill are covered with most venerable and other very reverend vegetables, that, like most other people, are always dreaming out their old stories to the wind. At the foot of one of these squats ME (*il penseroso*), and the other the trunk for a whole morning. The timorous hare and the squirrel gambol around me like Adam in Paradise before Eve; but I think he did not use to read Virgil, as I do.

This is the first expression, as far as I am aware, of the modern feeling of the picturesque. We shall find it become more and more a characteristic in the letters of Gray as years went by. In this letter, too, we find that at the age of twenty-one he had already acquired that sprightly wit and variety of manner which made him one of the most delightful letter writers of the eighteenth century.

At Burnham, in 1737, he made the acquaintance of a very interesting waif of the preceding century, Thomas Southerne, the once famous author of *Dramatic Miscellany*, *Fatal Marriage*, the last survivor of the great

you right. My Father and Mother desire me to send their compliments, and I beg you'd believe me

"Sr., your most obed<sup>t</sup>. humble Serv<sup>t</sup>."

"T. GRAY."

The amusing point is that the tutor seems to have flown into a rage at the pert tone of this epistle, and we have a rough draft of two replies on the fly-sheet. The first dresses him as "pretty Mr. Gray," and is a moral box to the ear; but this has been cancelled, as wrath gave way to discretion, and the final answer is very friendly, and states that the writer would do anything "for your father or your uncle, Mr. Antrobus (Thos.)." Signor Piazza had been the Italian master to the University, and six months before we find Gray, and apparently Horace Walpole also, learning Italian "like any dragon." The course of study had been entirely out of sympathy with Gray's instinctive movements after knowledge. He complains bitterly of having to endure lectures daily and hourly, and of having to waste his time over mathematics where his teacher was the celebrated Professor Nicholas Saunderson, whose masterly *Elements of Algebra*, and towards the text-books of the University, were still known only by oral tradition. For such learning Gray had neither taste nor patience. "It is very possible," he writes to Walpole, "that two and two make four, but I would not give a farthing to demonstrate this ever so clearly; and if I could be the profits of life, give me the amusements of it." On account of the low condition of classic learning at Cambridge we must take with a grain of salt. As an undergraduate he would of course see nothing of the great life of the University, now sinking beneath the horizon; and as a shy lad as he would not be asked to share the conversation of Bentley, or Snape, or the venerable Master of Jesus.

What does seem clear, from his repeated denunciations of "that pretty collection of desolate animals" called Cambridge, is that classical taste was at a very low ebb among the junior fellows and the elder undergraduates. The age of the great Latinists had passed away; the Greek revival, which Gray did much to start, had not begun, and 1737 was certainly a dull year at the University. It seems that there were no Greek text books for the use of schools until 1741, and the method of pronouncing that language was as depraved as possible. A few hackneyed extracts from Homer and Hesiod were all that a youth was required to have read in order to pass his examination. Plato and Aristotle were almost unknown, and Gray himself seems to have been the only person at Cambridge who attempted seriously to write Greek verse. It is not difficult to understand that when, with the third term of his second year, his small opportunities of classical reading were taken from him, and he saw himself descend into the Cimmerian darkness of undiluted mathematics, the heart of the young poet sank within him. In December, 1736, there was an attempt at rebellion; he declined to take degrees, and announced his intention of quitting college, but as we hear no more of this, and as he stayed two years longer at Cambridge, we may believe that this was overruled.

Meanwhile the leaden rod seemed to rule the fate of the quadruple alliance. West grew worse and worse, hopelessly entangled in consumptive symptoms. Walpole lost his mother in August of 1737, and after this was a kind of waif and stray until he finally left England in 1739. Gray, whether in Cambridge or London, reverts more and more constantly to his melancholy. "Low spirits are my true and faithful companions; they get up with me, go to bed with me, make journeys and returns as I do; nay,

and pay visits, and will even affect to be jocose, and force a feeble laugh with me; but most commonly we sit together, and are the prettiest insipid company in the world. However, when you come," he writes to West, "I believe they must undergo the fate of all humble companions, and be discarded. Would I could turn them to the same use that you have done, and make an Apollo of them. If they could write such verses with me, not hartshorn, nor spirit of amber, nor all that furnishes the closet of the apothecary's wisdom, should persuade me to part with them." For West had been writing a touching eulogy *ad amicos*, in the manner of Tibullus, inspired by real feeling and a sad presentiment of the death that lay five years ahead. In reading these lines of Gray's we hardly know whether most to admire the marvellous lightness and charm of the style, or to be concerned at such confession of want of spirits in a lad of twenty-one. His letters, however, when they could be wrung out of his apathy, were precious to poor West at Oxford: "I find no physic comparable to your letters: prescribe to me, dear Gray, as often and as much as you think proper," and the amiable young pedants proceed, as before, to the analysis of Poseidippos, and Lucretius, and such like frivolous reading. One of West's letters contains a piece of highly practical advice: "Indulge, amabo te, plusquam soles, corporis exercitationibus," but bodily exercise was just what Gray declined to indulge in to the end of his life. He does not seem to have been even a walker; in-doors he was a bookworm, and out-of-doors a saunterer and a dreamer; nor was there ever, it would seem, a "good friend Matthew" to urge the too pensive student out into the light of common life.

Certain interesting poetical exercises mark the close of Gray's undergraduate career. A Latin ode in Sapphics

fragment in Abinger were sent in June, 1834, to a friend who had just left Oxford for the house of his friend of theirs, which is so brief that it may safely be cited here:

"O lacrimas in fine teneras zetes

Discentium ovis ex ambo, quater

Voluit in inaequali sententia

Pictore te, pia Nempha, recitavit."

called forth high eulogy from such days of every succeeding generation. It is in such letters and poems of such a kind that we find the very pointlessness of Gray's personality and delicacy. To July, 1737, belongs a version of English heroics of a long passage from *Properzia*, beginning

"Non prostrata, Bacchos, at the shrine I bend thee."

I have not met with in print; and another piece of the same poet, beginning "Long as of youth," which is in all the editions of Gray, bears on the original at Pembroke the date December, 1739. It may be noted that in the printed copies the last two lines are

"You whose young bosoms feel a nobler flame

Redeem what Crassus lost and vindicate his name."

accidentally dropped out. In September, 1739, Gray came to Cambridge, and took up his abode in his father's house for a month, apparently with no definite plans regarding his future career, but out of this sleepers were wakened. He was suddenly waked by Horace Walpole's proposition that they should start together on the grand tour. The offer was a generous one. Walpole was to pay all the expenses, but Gray was to be absolutely independent.



and pay visits, and will even affect to be jocular, and for a feeble laugh with me; but most commonly we sit together, and are the prettiest insipid company in the world. However, when you come," he writes to West, "I believe they must undergo the fate of all humble companions, and be discarded. Would I could turn them to the same use that you have done, and make an Apollo of them. If they could write such verses with me, not hartshorn, nor spirit of amber, nor all that furnishes the closet of the apothecary's wisdom, should persuade me to part with them. For West had been writing a touching eulogy *ad amicum* in the manner of Tibullus, inspired by real feeling and sad presentiment of the death that lay five years ahead. In reading these lines of Gray's we hardly know whether most to admire the marvellous lightness and charm of the style, or to be concerned at such confession of want of spirits in a lad of twenty-one. His letters, however, when they could be wrung out of his apathy, were precious to poor West at Oxford: "I find no physic comparable to your letters: prescribe to me, dear Gray, as often and as much as you think proper," and the amiable young poetants proceed, as before, to the analysis of Pœcidiippe and Lucretius, and such like frivolous reading. One of West's letters contains a piece of highly practical advice: "Indulge, amabo te, plusquam soles, corporis exercitationibus," but bodily exercise was just what Gray declined to indulge in to the end of his life. He does not seem to have been even a walker; in-doors he was a bookworm, and out-of-doors a saunterer and a dreamer; nor was there ever, it would seem, a "good friend Matthew" to urge the too pensive student out into the light of common life.

Certain interesting poetical exercises mark the close of Gray's undergraduate career. A Latin ode in Sapphic

dent: there was no talk of the poet's accompanying his younger friend in any secondary capacity, and it is only fair to Horace Walpole to state that he seems to have acted in a thoroughly kind and gentlemanly spirit. What was still more remarkable was that, without letting Gray know, he made out his will before starting, and so arranged that, had he died whilst abroad, Gray would have been his sole legatee. The frivolities of Horace Walpole have been dissected with the most cruel frankness; it is surely only just to point out that in this instance he acted a very gracious and affectionate part. On the 29th of March 1739, the two friends started from Dover.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GRAND TOUR.

GRAY was only out of his native country once, but that single visit to the Continent lasted for nearly three years, and produced a very deep impression upon his character. It is difficult to realize what he would have become without this stimulus to the animal and external part of his nature. He was in danger of settling down in a species of moral inertia, of becoming dull and torpid, of spoiling a great poet to make a little pedant. The happy frivolities of France and Italy, though they were powerless over the deep springs of his being, stirred the surface of it, and made him bright and human. It is to be noticed that we hear nothing of his "true and faithful companion, melancholy," whilst he is away in the South; he was cheerfully occupied, taken out of himself, and serene in the gaiety of others. The two friends enjoyed a very rough passage from Dover to Calais, and on landing Gray anticipated Dr. Johnson by being surprised that the inhabitants of the country could speak French so well. He also discovered that they were all "Papishes," and briskly adapted himself to the custom of the land by attending high-mass the next day, which happened to be Easter Monday. In the afternoon the companions set out through a snow-storm for Boulogne in a post-chaise, a conveyance—not

then imported into England—which filled the young men with hilarious amazement. Walpole, sensibly suggesting that there was no cause for hurry, refused to be driven express to Paris; and so they loitered very agreeably through Picardy, stopping at Montreuil, Abbeville, and Amiens. From the latter city Gray wrote an amusing account of his journey to his mother, containing a lively description of French scenery. “The country we have passed through hitherto has been flat, open, but agreeably diversified with villages, fields well cultivated, and little rivers. On every hillock is a windmill, a crucifix, or a Virgin Mary dressed in flowers and a saracenet robe; one sees not many people or carriages on the road. Now and then indeed you meet a strolling friar, a countryman with his great muff, or a woman riding astride on a little ass, with short petticoats, and a great head-dress of blue wool.”

On the 9th of April, rather late on a Saturday evening, they rolled into Paris, and after a bewildering drive drew up at last at the lodgings which had been prepared for them, probably in or near the British Embassy, and found themselves warmly welcomed by Walpole’s cousins, the Conways, and by Lord Holderness. These young men were already in the thick of the gay Parisian tumult, and introduced Walpole and Gray also, as his friend, to the best society. The very day after their arrival they dined at Lord Holderness’s to meet the Abbé Prévôt-d’Exiles, author of that masterpiece of passion, *Manon Lescaut*, and now in his forty-second year. It is very much to be deplored that we do not possess in any form Gray’s impressions of the illustrious Frenchmen with whom he came into habitual contact during the next two months. He merely mentions the famous comic actress, Mademoiselle Jeanne Quinault “la Cadette,” who was even then, though

in the flower of her years, coquettishly threatening to leave the stage, and who did actually retire, amidst the regrets of a whole city, before Gray came back to England. She reminded the young Englishman of Mrs. Clive, the actress, but he says nothing of those famous Sunday suppers at which she presided, and at which all that was witty and brilliant in Paris was rehearsed or invented. These meetings, afterwards developed into the sessions of the Société du Bout du Banc, were then only in their infancy; yet there, from his corner unobserved, the little English poet must have keenly noted many celebrities of the hour, whose laurels were destined to wither when his were only beginning to sprout. There would be found the "most cruel of amateurs," the Comte de Caylus, Votvenon, still in the flush of his reputation; Moncrif, the lover of cats, with his strange dog face; and there or elsewhere we know that Gray met and admired that prince of frivolidious ingenuities, the redoubtable Marivaux. But of all this his letters tell us nothing—nothing even of the most curious of his friendships, that with Crébillon *fils*, who, according to Walpole, was their constant companion during their stay in Paris.

All the critics of Gray have found it necessary to excuse or explain away that remarkable statement of his, that "as the paradisaical pleasures of the Mahometans consist in playing upon the flute, *etc.*, be mine to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crébillon." Mason considered this very whimsical, and later editors have hoped that it meant nothing at all. But Gray was not a man to say what he did not mean, even in jest. Such a reasonable and unprejudiced mind as his may be credited with a meaning, however paradoxical the statement it makes. It is quite certain, from various remarks scattered through his

correspondence, that the literature of the French Regency, the boudoir poems and novels of the alcove, gave him more pleasure than any other form of contemporary literature. He uses language, in speaking of Gresset, the author of *Vert-Vert*, which contrasts curiously with his coldness towards Sterne and Collins. But, above all, he delighted in Crébillon. Hardly had he arrived in Paris, than he sent West the *Lettres de la Marquise M\*\*\* au Comte de R\*\*\**, which had been published in 1732, but which the success of *Tançai et Néardané* had pushed into a new edition. The younger Crébillon at this time was in his thirty-second year, discreet, confident, the friend of every one, the best company in Paris; half his time spent in wandering over the cheerful city that he loved so much, the other half given to literature in the company of that strange colossus, his father, the tragic poet, the writing-room of this odd couple being shared with a menagerie of cats and dogs and queer feathered folk. Always a serviceable creature, and perhaps even already possessed with something of that Anglomania which led him at last into a sort of morganatic marriage with British aristocracy, Crébillon evidently did all he could to make Walpole and Gray happy in Paris; no chaperon could be more fitting than he to a young Englishman desirous of threading the mazes of that rose-colored Parisian Arcadia which had survived the days of the Regency, and had not yet ceased to look on Louis XV. as the Celadon of its pastoral valleys. It was a charming world of fancy and caprice; a world of milky clouds floating in an infinite azure, and bearing a mundane Venus to her throne on a Frenchified Cithæron. And what strange figures were bound to the golden car; generals, and abbés, and elderly Academicians, laughing philosophers and weeping tragedians, a motley crew united

in the universal *culte du Tendre*, gliding down a stream of elegance and cheerfulness and tolerance that was by no means wholly ignoble.

All this, but especially the elegance and the tolerance, made a deep impression upon the spirit of Gray. He came from a Puritan country; and was himself, like so many of our greatest men, essentially a Puritan at heart; but he was too acute not to observe where English practice was unsatisfactory. Above all, he seems to have detected the English deficiency in style and grace; a deficiency then, in 1739, far more marked than it had been half a century earlier. He could not but contrast the young English squire, that engaging and florid creature, with the bright, sarcastic, sympathetic companion of his walks in Paris, not without reflecting that the healthier English lad was almost sure to develop into a terrible type of fox-hunting stupidity in middle life. He, for one, then, and to the end of his days, would cast in his lot with what was refined and ingenious, and would temper the robustness of his race with a little Gallic brightness. Moreover, his taste for the novels of Marivaux and Crébillon, with their ingenious analysis of emotion, their odour of musk and ambergris, their affectation of artless innocence, and their quick parry of wit, was not without excuse in a man framed as Gray was for the more brilliant exercises of literature, and forced to feed, in his own country, if he must read romances at all, on the coarse rubbish of Mrs. Behn or Mrs. Manley. Curiously enough, at that very moment Samuel Richardson was preparing for the press that excellent narrative of *Pamela* which was destined to found a great modern school of fiction in England, a school which was soon to sweep into contempt and oblivion all the "crebillonage marivaux" which

Gray delighted in, a contempt so general that one stray reader here or there can scarcely venture to confess that he still finds the *Hasard au coin du Feu* very pleasant and innocent reading. We shall have to refer once again to this subject, when we reach the humorous poems in which Gray introduced into English literature this rococo manner.

Gray became quite a little fop in Paris. He complains that the French tailor has covered him with silk and fringe, and has widened his figure with buckram a yard on either side. His waistcoat and breeches are so tight that he can scarcely breathe; he ties a vast solitaire around his neck, wears ruffles at his fingers' ends, and sticks his two arms into a muff. Thus made beautifully genteel, he and Walpole rolled in their coach to the Comedy and the Opera, visited Versailles and the sights of Paris, attended installations and spectacles, and saw the best of all that was to be seen. Gray was absolutely delighted with his new existence. "I could entertain myself this month," he wrote to West, "merely with the common streets and the people in them;" and Walpole, who was good-nature itself during all this early part of the tour, insisted on sending Gray out in his coach to see all the collections of fine art, and other such sights as were not congenial to himself, since Horace Walpole had not yet learned to be a connoisseur. Gray occupied himself no less with music, and his letters to West contain some amusing criticisms of French opera. The performers, he says, "come in and sing sentiment in lamentable strains, neither air nor recitation; only, to one's great joy, they were every now and then interrupted by a dance, or, to one's great sorrow, by a chorus that borders the stage from one end to the other, and screams, past all power of



of asking, 'Why should we not sup here?' I was laid by the side of a fountain under the tree, supper served up; after which another said, 'Come directly began herself. From singing we inserted and singing in a round; when somebody mentioned immediately a company of them was ordered, met in the open air, and then came country dances, at o'clock next morning; at which hour the gayer of them that such as were weary should get into their arms, and of them should dance before them with the music. In this manner we paraded through all the principal streets, and waked everybody in it. Mr. Walpole had a great tom of the thing, and would have given a ball next week; but the women did not come into it, and drop, and they will return to their dull cards and

Walpole intended to spend the winter in the South of France, and was therefore not at home by the way. They thought to stay a fortnight, but they received a vague intimation that the king and that prince of idle companions, the Duke of George Selwyn, were coming, and they waited several months in expectation of them. At last, in the middle of September, they left Rheims, and entered Lyons. Later. The capital of Burgundy, with its riches and treasuries of art, made Gray regret the months they had spent at Rheims, which he was eager to set off, would only allow him a few days for exploration. On the 18th of October they were at Lyons, and this town became their headquarters for the next six weeks. The junction of the Rhone provoked a multitude of conceits, but none so pretty as this of Gray's: "The Rhone a people, who, though of tempers extremely different, to join hands here, and make a little party."

II.]

Mediterranean in company; the lady comes gliding along through the fruitful plains of Burgundy, *incredibili lenitate, ita ut oculis in utram partem fuit judicari non possit*; the gentleman runs all rough and roaring down from the mountains of Switzerland to meet her; and with all her soft airs she likes him never the worse; she goes through the middle of the city in state, and he passes *incog.* without the walls, but waits for her a little below."

A fortnight later the friends set out on an excursion across the mountains, that they might accompany Henry Conway, who was now leaving them, as far as Geneva. They took the longest road through Savoy, that they might visit the Grande Chartreuse, which impressed Gray very forcibly by the solitary grandeur of its situation. It was, however, not on this occasion, but two years later, that he wrote his famous *Alcaic Ode* in the album of the monastery. The friends slept as the guests of the fathers, and proceeded next day to Chambéry, which greatly disappointed them; and sleeping one night at Aix-les-Bains, which they found deserted, and another at Annecy, they arrived at last at Geneva. They stayed there a week, partly to see Conway settled, and partly because they found it very bright and hospitable, returning at last to Lyons through the spurs of the Jura, and across the plains of La Bresse. They found awaiting them a letter from Sir Robert Walpole, in which he desired his son to go on to Italy, so they gladly resigned their project of spending the winter in France, and pushed on at once to the foot of the Alps; armed against the cold with "muffs, hoods, and masks of beaver, fur boots, and bearskins." On the 6th of November they descended into Italy, after a very severe and painful journey of a week's duration, through two days of which they were hardly less frightened than Addi-

son had been during his Alpine adventures a generation earlier. It was on the sixth day of this journey that an incident occurred which was so graphically described by Gray and Walpole, and which is often referred to. Walpole had a fat little black spaniel, called Tory, of which he was very fond of; and as this pampered creature trotting beside the ascending chaise, enjoying his robust constitutional, a young wolf sprung out of the cover and snatched the shrieking favourite away from among the carriages and servants before any one had the presence of mind to draw a pistol. Walpole screamed and wept, and Tory had disappeared forever. Mason regrets that Gray did not write a mock-heroic poem on this incident, and his companion to the ode on Walpole's cat, and it may be admitted that the theme was an excellent one.

The name of Addison has just been mentioned in connection with Walpole's remarks about the horrors of Alpine travel. We do indeed savour of the old-fashioned fear of what is sublime in nature. But Gray's sentiments on this occasion were very different, and his letter to his mother relates on the beauty of the crags and precipices in the Alps that shows him to have been the first of the romantic lovers of nature, since even Rousseau had then hardly developed his later and more famous attitude, and had only just begun to contemplate the sea with enthusiasm. On the 7th of November, 1739, the travellers had reached Turin, but amongst the clean streets and formal architecture of that prosaic city the thoughts of Gray were still continually in the wonders he had left behind him. In a delightful letter to West, written nine days later, he is still dreaming of the Alps: "I own I have not, anywhere met with those grand and simple works of nature that are to amaze one, and whose sight one is to

better for; but those of nature have astonished me beyond expression. In our little journey up to the Grande Chartreuse I do not remember to have gone ten paces without an exclamation that there was no restraining; *not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry.* There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument. One need not have a very fantastic imagination to see spirits there at noon-day. You have Death perpetually before your eyes, only so far removed as to compose the mind without frightening it. I am well persuaded St. Bruno was a man of no common genius, to choose such a situation for his retirement; and perhaps I should have been a disciple of his, had I been born in his time." It is hard to cease quoting, all this letter being so new, and beautiful, and suggestive; but perhaps enough has been given to show in what terms and on what occasion the picturesqueness of Switzerland was first discovered. At the same time the innovator concedes that Mont Cenis does, perhaps, abuse its privilege of being frightful. Amongst the precipices Gray read Livy, *Nives cælo prope immistæ*, but when the chaise drove down into the sunlit plains of Italy, he laid that severe historian aside, and plunged into the pages of Silius Italicus.

On the 18th of November they passed on to Genoa, which Gray particularly describes as "a vast semicircular basin, full of fine blue sea, and vessels of all sorts and sizes, some sailing out, some coming in, and others at anchor; and all round it palaces, and churches peeping over one another's heads, gardens, and marble terraces full of orange and cypress trees, fountains and trellis-works covered with vines, which altogether compose the grandest of theatres." The music in Italy was a feast to him, and

from this time we may date that careful study of music which occupied a great part of the ensuing Ten days at Genoa left them deeply in love with both to depart; but they wished to push on, and the mountains, they found themselves within three days at Piacenza, and so at Parma; out of which city they were locked on a cold winter's night, and were obliged to gain admittance by an ingenious stratagem which amused them very much, but which they have no means to record. They greatly enjoyed the Correggion place, for Horace Walpole was now learning to be a connoisseur, and then they proceeded to Bologna, where they spent twelve days in seeing the sights. They found it very irksome to be without introductions, especially the hospitality which they had enjoyed in France. In winter they could only see, in Gray's words, the skeleton of Italy. He was at least able to observe the public and scandalous doings between the vine and the elm-trees, and how the olive-trees are shocked there. It is also particularly pleasant to learn that he himself "grown as fat as a hog;" he was, in fact, perfectly well, perhaps for the only time in his life.

They crossed the Apennines on the 15th of the month, and descended through a winding-sheet of mist to the streets of Florence, where Mr. Horace Mann's servant met them at the gates, and conducted them to his house, which, with a certain interval, was to be their home for fifteen months. Horace Mann was a dull lettered man, but he seems to have been a very engaging and interesting companion. Gray, a man not easily pleased, pronounced him "the best and most obliging person in the world." He was then resident, and afterwards employed as extraordinary, at the Court of Tuscany, and retains

in history as the correspondent of Horace Walpole through nearly half a century of undivided friendship. Here again the travel-stained youths had the pleasures of society offered to them, and Gray could encase himself again in silk and buckram, and wear ruffles at the tips of his fingers. Moreover, his mind, the most actively acquisitive then stirring in Europe, could engage once more in its enchanting exercises, and store up miscellaneous information with unflagging zeal in a thousand nooks of brain and note-book. Music, painting, and statuary occupied him chiefly, and his unpublished catalogues, not less strikingly than his copious printed notes, show the care and assiduity of his research. His *Criticisms on Architecture and Painting in Italy* is not an amusing treatise, but it is without many of the glaring faults of the æsthetic dissertations of the age. The remarks about antique sculpture are often very just and penetrative—as fine sometimes as those exquisite notes by Shelley, which first saw the light in 1880. Some of his views about modern masters, too, show the native propriety of his taste, and his entire indifference to contemporary judgment. For Caravaggio, for instance, then at the height of his vogue, he has no patience; although, in common with all critics of the eighteenth century, and all human beings till about a generation ago, he finds Guido inexpressibly brilliant and harmonious. It is, however, chiefly interesting to us to notice that in these copious notes on painting Gray distinguishes himself from other writers of his time by his simple and purely artistic mode of considering what is presented to him, every other critic, as far as I remember, down to Lessing and Winckelmann, being chiefly occupied with rhetorical definitions of the action upon the human mind of art in the abstract. Gray scarcely men-

tions a single work, however, precedent to the age of Raphael; and it will not do to insist too strongly on his independence of the prejudices of his time.

In music he seems to have been still better occupied. He was astonished, during his stay in Florence, at the beauty and originality of the new school of Italian composers, at that time but little known in England. He seems to have been particularly struck with Leonardo Vinci, who was then just dead, and with Bononcini and the German Hasse, who were still alive. At Naples a few months later he found Leonardo Leo, and was attracted by his genius. But the full ardour of his admiration was reserved for the works of G. B. Pergolesi, whose elevation above the other musicians of his age Gray was the first to observe and assert. Pergolesi, who had died four years before, at the age of twenty-six, was entirely unknown outside Tuscany; and to the English poet belongs the praise, it is said, of being the first to bring a collection of his pieces to London, and to obtain for this great mass a hearing in British concert-rooms. Gray was one of the few poets who have possessed not merely an ear for music, but considerable executive skill. Mason tells us that he enjoyed probably at this very time, instruction on the harpsichord from the younger Scarlatti, but his main gift was for music. He had a small but very clear and pure voice, which was much admired for his singing in his youth, but in his later years was so shy that Walpole "never could but prevail on him to give a proof of it; and then it was with so much pain to himself, that it gave Walpole no more than a moment of pleasure." In after-years he had a harpsichord in his rooms at college, and continued to cultivate this sentimental sort of company in his long periods of solitude. He formed a valuable collection of MS. music whilst he was

temptible and disgusting. There was no society among the Roman nobles, who pushed parsimony to an extreme and showed not the least hospitality. "In short, child (Walpole says to West, on the 16th of April), "after sunset one passes one's time here very ill; and if I did not wish for you in the mornings, it would be no complime to tell you that I do in the evening." From Tivoli, a month later, Gray writes West a very contemptuous description of the artificial cascades and cliffs of the Du of Modena's palace-gardens there; but a few days afterwards, at Alba and Frascati, he was inspired in a gentle mood with the *Alcaic Ode to Faronius*, beginning "Matrosarum." Of the same date is a letter laughing at West who had made some extremely classical allusions in his correspondence, and who is indulged with local colour in his heart's content:

"I am to-day just returned from Alba, a good deal fatigued, you know (from Statius) that the Appian is somewhat tiresome. We dined at Pompey's; he indeed was gone for a few days to his T. eulan, but, by the care of his villicus, we made an admirable meal. We had the dugs of a pregnant sow, a peacock, a dish of thrush, a noble scarus just fresh from the Tyrrhene, and some conchyliæ from the Lake, with garum sauce. For my part, I never ate better at Lucullus's table. We drank half a dozen cyathi apiece of ancient Alban to Pholoë's health; and, after bathing, and playing an hour at ball, we mounted our essedum again, and proceeded up the mount to the temple. The priests there entertained us with an account of a wonderful shower of birds' eggs, that had fallen two days before, which had no sooner touched the ground but they were converted into geese; as also that the night past a dreadful voice had been heard out of the Adytum, which spoke Greek during a full half-hour, nobody understood it. But, quitting my Romanities, to your great joy and mine, let me tell you in plain English that we come from Albano."



Some entertainments Gray had at Rome. He mentions one ball at which he performed the part of the mouse at the party. The chief virtuoso of the hour, La Diamantina, played on the violin, and Giovannino and Pasquellini sang. All the secular *grand monde* of Rome was there, and there Gray, from the corner where he sat regaling himself with iced fruits, watched the object of his hearty disapproval, the English Pretender, "displaying his rueful length of person." Gray's hatred of the Stuarts was one of his few pronounced political sentiments, and whilst at Rome he could not resist making a contemptuous jest of them in a letter which he believed that James would open. He says, indeed, that all letters sent or received by English people in Rome were at that time read by the Pretender. In June, as the cardinals could not make up their minds, the young men decided to wait no longer, and proceeded southwards to Terracina, Capua, and Naples. On the 17th of June they visited the remains of Herculaneum, then only just exposed and identified, and before the end of the month they went back to Rome. There, still finding that no Pope was elected, and weary of the dreariness and formality of that great city, Walpole determined to return to Florence. They had now been absent from home and habitually thrown upon one another for entertainment during nearly fifteen months, and their friendship had hitherto shown no abatement. But they had arrived at that point of familiarity when a very little disagreement is sufficient to produce a quarrel. No such serious falling-out happened for nearly a year more, but we find Gray, whose note-books were inexhaustible, a little peevish at being forced to leave the treasures of Rome so soon. However, Florence was very enjoyable. They took up their abode once more in the house of Horace

Mann, where they looked down into the Arno from the bedroom windows, and could resort at a moment's notice to the marble bridge, to hear music, eat iced fruits, and sup by moonlight. It is a place, Gray says, "excellent to employ all one's animal sensations in, but utterly contrary to one's rational powers. I have struck a medal upon myself; the device is thus O, and the motto *Vita Lissima*, which I take in the most concise manner to contain a full account of my person, sentiments, occupation and late glorious successes. We get up at twelve o'clock, breakfast till three, dine till four, sleep till six, drink cooling liquors till eight, go to the bridge till ten, sup till twelve and so sleep till twelve again."

In the midst of all this laziness, however, the business of literature recurred to his thoughts. He wrote some short things in Latin, then a fragment of sixty hexameter verses on the Gaurus, and then set about a very ambitious didactic epic, *De Principiis Cogitandi*. It is a curious commentary on the small bulk of Gray's poetical productions to point out that this Latin poem, only two fragments of which were ever written, is considerably the longest of his writings in verse. As we now possess it, it was chiefly written in Florence during the summer of 1740; some passages were added at Stoke in 1742; but by that time Gray had determined, like other learned Cambridge poets, Spenser and Milton, to bend to the vulgar ear, and leave his Latin behind him. The *De Principiis Cogitandi* is now entirely neglected, and at no time attracted much curiosity; yet it is a notable production in its way. It was an attempt to crystallize the philosophy of Locke, for which Gray entertained the customary reverence of his age, in Lucretian hexameters. How the Soul begins to Know; by what primary Notions Mnemosyne opens her

succession of thoughts, and her slender chain of ideas; how Reason contrives to augment her slow empire in the natural breast of man; and how anger, sorrow, fear, and anxious care are implanted there—of these things he applies himself to sing; and do not thou disdain the singer, thou glory, thou unquestioned second luminary of the English race, thou unnamed spirit of John Locke. With the exception of one episode, in which he compares the human mind in reverie to a Hamadryad who wanders in the woodland, and is startled to find herself mirrored in a pool, the plan of this poem left no scope for fancy or fine imagery; the theme is treated with a certain rhetorical dignity, but the poet has been so much occupied with the matter in hand, that his ideas have suffered some congestion. Nevertheless he is himself, and not Virgil or Ovid or Lucretius, and this alone is no small praise for a writer of modern Latin verse.

If the *De Principiis Cogitandi* had been published when it was written, it is probable that it would have won some measure of instant celebrity for its author, but the undiluted conclusions of Locke were no longer interesting in a second-hand form in 1774, when they had already been subjected to the expansions of Hume and the criticisms of Leibnitz. Nor was Gray at all on the wave of philosophical thought; he seems no less indifferent to Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* than he is unaware of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, which had been printed in 1739, soon after Gray left England. This Latin epic was a distinct false start, but he did not totally abandon the hope of completing it until 1746.

In August, 1740, the friends went over to Bologna for a week, and on their return had the mortification to learn that a Pope, Benedict XII., had been elected whilst they

were within four days' journey of Rome. They began to think of home; there were talks of taking a felucca over from Leghorn to Marseilles, or of crossing through Germany by Venice and the Tyrol. Florence they began to find "one of the dullest cities in Italy," and there is no doubt that they began to be on very strained and uncomfortable terms with one another. They had the grace, however, absolutely to conceal it from other people, and to the very last each of them wrote to West without the least hint of want of confidence in the other. On the 24th of April, 1741, Gray and Walpole set off from Florence, and spent a few days in Bologna to hear La Viscontina sing; from Bologna they proceeded to Reggio, and there occurred the famous quarrel which has perhaps been more often discussed than any other fact in Gray's life. It has been said that he discovered Walpole opening a letter addressed to Gray, or perhaps written by him, to see if anything unpleasant about himself were said in it, and that he broke away from him with scathing anger and scorn, casting Walpole off forever, and at once continuing his journey to Venice alone. But this is really little more than conjecture. Both the friends were very careful to keep their counsel, and within three years the breach was healed. One thing is certain, that Walpole was the offender. When Gray was dead and Mason was writing his life, Walpole insisted that this fact should be stated, although he very reasonably declined to go into particulars for the public. He wrote a little paragraph for Mason, taking the blame upon himself, but added for the biographer's private information a longer and more intelligible account, saying that "while one is living it is not pleasant to read one's private quarrels discussed in magazines and newspapers," but desiring that Mason would preserve this

particular account, that it might be given to posterity. But Walpole lived on until 1797, and by a singular coincidence Mason, who was so much younger, only survived him a few days. Accordingly there was a delay in giving this passage to the world; and though it is known to students of Horace Walpole's *Correspondence*, it has never taken the authoritative place it deserves in Gray's life. It is all we possess in the way of direct evidence, and it does great credit no less to Walpole's candour than to his experience of the human heart. He wrote to Mason (March 2, 1773):

"I am conscious that in the beginning of the differences between Gray and me the fault was mine. I was too young, too fond of my own diversions, nay, I do not doubt, too much intoxicated by indulgence, vanity, and the insolence of my situation as Prime minister's son, not to have been inattentive and insensible to the feelings of one I thought below me; of one, I blush to say it, that I knew was obliged to me; of one whom presumption and folly, perhaps, made me deem not my superior *then* in parts, though I have since felt my infinite inferiority to him. I treated him insolently; he loved me, and I did not think he did. I reproached him with the difference between us, when he acted from convictions of knowing he was my superior. I often disregarded his wishes of seeing places, which I would not quit other amusements to visit, though I offered to send him to them without me. Forgive me, if I say that his temper was not conciliating; at the same time that I will confess to you that he acted a more friendly part, had I had the sense to take advantage of it—he freely told me of my faults. I declared I did not desire to hear them, nor would correct them. You will not wonder that, with the dignity of his spirit and the obstinate carelessness of mine, the breach must have grown wider till we became incompatible."

This is the last word on the subject of the quarrel, and after a statement so generous, frank, and lucid it only remains to remind the reader that these were heads of twenty-three

and twenty-four respectively, that they had been thrown far too exclusively and too long on one another for entertainment, and that probably Walpole is too hard upon himself in desiring to defend Gray. There is not the slightest trace in his letters or in Gray's of any rudeness on Walpole's part. The main point is that the quarrel was made up in 1744, and that after some coldness on Gray's side they became as intimate as ever for the remainder of their lives.

Walpole stayed at Reggio, and Gray's heart would have been stirred with remorse had he known that his old friend was even then sickening for a quinsy, of which he might have died, if the excellent Joseph Spence, Oxford Professor of Poetry, and the friend of Pope, had not happened to be passing through Reggio with Lord Lincoln, and had not given up his whole time to nursing him. Meanwhile the unconscious Gray, sore with pride, passed on to Venice where he spent two months in the company of a Mr. Whitehead and a Mr. Chute. In July he hired a courier, passed leisurely through the north of Italy, visiting Padua and Verona, reached Turin on the 15th of August, and began to cross the Alps next day. He stayed once more at the Grande Chartreuse, and inscribed in the Album of the Fathers his famous *Alcaic Ode*, beginning "Oh Tu, severa Religio loci," which is the best known and practically the last of his Latin poems. In this little piece of twenty lines we first recognize that nicety of expression, that delicate lapidary style, that touch of subdued romantic sentiment, which distinguish the English poetry of Gray; which it is perhaps not fantastic to detect in its closing lines the first dawn of those ideas which he afterwards expanded into the *Elegy in a Country Church-yard*. The original MS. in the album became an object of great interest to visitors to the hospice after Gray's death, and was highly

ed by the fathers. It exists, however, no longer; it destroyed by a rabble from Grenoble during the French Revolution. Gray reached Lyons on the 25th of August, and returned to London on the 1st of September, 1741, after an absence from England of exactly two years five months. Walpole, being cured of his complaint, arrived in England ten days later. To a good-natured letter from Henry Conway, suggesting a renewal of intimacy between the friends, Gray returned an answer of the coldest civility, and Horace Walpole now disappears from our narrative for three years.

### CHAPTER III.

STOKE-POGIS.—DEATH OF WEST.—FIRST ENGLISH PORT

ON his return from Italy Gray found his father lying v  
ill, exhausted by successive attacks of gout, and unable  
rally from them. Two months later, on the 6th of Nov  
ber, 1741, he died in a paroxysm of the disease. His  
act had been to squander his fortune, which seems to h  
remained until that time almost unimpaired, on buildin  
country-house at Wanstead. Not only had he not writ  
to tell his son of this adventure, but he had actually c  
trived to conceal it from his wife. Mason is not cor  
in saying that it became necessary to sell this house  
mediately after Philip Gray's death, or that it fete  
2000*l.* less than it had cost; it remained in the pos  
sion of Mrs. Gray. With the ruins of a fortune M  
Gray and her sister, Mary Antrobus, seem to have k  
house for a year in Cornhill, till, on the death of th  
brother-in-law, Mr. Jonathan Rogers, on the 21st of  
tober, 1742, they joined their widowed sister Anna in  
house at Stoke-Pogis, in Buckinghamshire. During th  
months they wound up their private business in Co  
hill, and disposed of their shop on tolerably advantage  
terms; and apparently Gray first imagined that the f  
ily property would be enough to provide amply for i



also. Accordingly he began the study of the law, that being the profession for which he had been originally intended. For six months or more he seems to have stayed in London, applying himself rather languidly to common law, and giving his real thoughts and sympathies to those who demanded them most, his mother and his unfortunate friend, Richard West. The latter, indeed, he found in a miserable condition. In June, 1740, that young man, having lived at the Temple till he was sick of it, left chambers, finding that neither the prestige of his grandfather nor the reputation of his uncle, Sir Thomas Burnet, advanced him at all in their profession. He was without heart in his work, his talents were not drawn out in the legal direction, and his affectionate and somewhat feminine nature suffered from loneliness and want of congenial society. He had hoped that Walpole would be able to find him a post in the diplomatic service or in the army; but this was not possible. Gray strongly disapproved of the step West took in leaving the Temple, and wrote him from Florence a letter full of kindly and cordial good-sense; but when he arrived in London he found West in a far more broken condition of mind and body than he had anticipated. In extreme agitation West confided to his friend a terrible secret which he had discovered, and which Gray preserved in silence until the close of his life, when he told it to Norton Nichols. It is a painful story, which need not be repeated here, but which involved the reputation of West's mother with the name of his late father's secretary, a Mr. Williams, whom she finally married when her son was dead. West had not the power to rally from this shock, and the comfort of Gray's society only slightly delayed the end. In March, 1742, he was obliged to leave town, and went to stay with

a friend at Popes, near Hatfield, Herts, where he lingered three months, and died.

The winter which Gray and West spent together in London was remarkable in the career of the former as the beginning of his most prolific year of poetical composition—a vocal year to be followed by six of obstinate silence. The first original production in English verse was a fragment of the tragedy of *Agrippina*, of which a complete scene and a few odd lines have been preserved in his works. In this attempt at the drama he was inspired by Racine, and neither Addison, nor Aaron Hill, nor James Thomson, had contrived to be more coldly academic a playwright. The subject, which had been treated in tragedy more than a century earlier by M. de Voltaire, was well adapted for stately stage-effect, and the scheme of Gray's play, so far as we know it, was not without interest. But he was totally unfitted to write for the boards, and even the beauty of versification in *Agrippina* cannot conceal from us for a moment its ineptitude. The only merit that exists of the play is little else than a soliloquy in which the Empress defies the rage of Nero, and shows that she possesses

“A heart that glows with the pure Julian fire,”

by daring her son to the contest :

“Around thee call

The gilded swarm that wantons in the sunshine  
Of thy full favour ; Seneca be there  
In gorgeous phrase of laboured eloquence  
To dress thy plea, and Burrhus strengthen it  
With his plain soldier's oath and honest seeming.  
Against thee—liberty and Agrippina !  
The world the prize ! and fair befall the victors !”

As a study in blank verse *Agrippina* shows the result of long apprenticeship to the ancients, and marches with a sharp and dignified step that reminds the reader more of Landor than of any other dramatist. In all other essentials, however, the tragedy must be considered, like the didactic epic, a false start; but Gray was now very soon to learn his real vocation.

The opening scene of the tragedy was sent down into Hertfordshire to amuse West, who seemed at first to have recovered his spirits, and who sat "purring by the fireside, in his arm-chair, with no small satisfaction." He was able to busy himself with literature, delighting in the new revision of the *Dunciad*, and reading Tacitus for the first time. His cool reception of the latter roused Gray to defend his favourite historian with great vigour. "Pray do not imagine," he says, "that Tacitus, of all authors in the world, can be tedious. . . . Yet what I admire in him above all is his detestation of tyranny, and the high spirit of liberty that every now and then breaks out, as it were, whether he would or no." Poor West, on the 4th of April, racked by an "importunissima tussis," declines to do battle against Tacitus, but attacks *Agrippina* with a frankness and a critical sagacity which slew that ill-starred tragedy on the spot. It is evident that Gray had no idea of West's serious condition, for he rallies him on being the first who ever made a muse of a cough, and is confident that "those wicked remains of your illness will soon give way to warm weather and gentle exercise." It is in the same letter that Gray speaks with some coldness of *Joseph Andrews*, and reverts with the warmth on which we have already commented to the much more congenial romances of Marivaux and Crébillon. We may here confess that Gray certainly misses, in common with most

men of his time, the one great charm of the literary character at its best, namely, enthusiasm for excellence in contemporaries. It is a sign of a dry age when the principal authors of a country look askance on one another. So silly critics in our own days have discovered with innumerable instances of the most poignant horror the existence of "mutual admiration societies." A little more acquaintance with the history of literature might have shown them how strong the sentiment of comradeship has been in every age of real intellectual vitality. It is much to be deplored that the chilliness of the eighteenth century prevented the "mutual admiration" of such men as Gray and Fielding.

This is perhaps an appropriate point at which to pause and consider the condition of English poetry at the moment at which we have now arrived. When Gray began seriously to write, in 1742, the considerable poets then alive in England might have been counted on the fingers of two hands. Pope and Swift were nearing the close of their careers of glory and suffering, the former still vigorous to the last, and now quite unrivalled by any predecessor in personal prestige. As a matter of fact, however, he was not destined to publish anything more of any consequence. Three other names, Goldsmith, Churchill, and Cowper, were those of children not to appear in literature for many years to come. Gray's actual competitors, therefore, were only four in number. Of these the eldest, Young, was just beginning to publish, at the age of fifty-eight, the only work by which he is now much remembered, or which can be read with pleasure. The *Night Thoughts* was destined to make him the most prominent poetical figure for the next ten years. Thomson, on the other hand, a younger and far more vital spirit, had practically retreated already upon his laurels, and was presently to die, without any

addressing the public, except in the luckless tragedy of *Sophonisba*, bequeathing, however, to posterity the treasure of his *Castle of Indolence*. Samuel Johnson had published *London*, a nine days' wonder, and had subsided into temporary oblivion. Collins, just twenty-one years of age, had brought out a pamphlet of *Persian Eclogues* without attracting the smallest notice from anybody. Amongst the lesser stars Allan Ramsay and Ambrose Philips were retired old men, now a long while silent, who remembered the days of Addison; Armstrong had flashed into unenviable distinction with a poem more clever than decorous; Dyer, one of the lazy men who grow fat too soon, was buried in his own *Fleece*; Shenstone and Akenside, much younger men, were beginning to be talked about in the circle of their friends, but had as yet done little. The stage, therefore, upon which Gray proceeded very gingerly to step, was not a crowded one, and before he actually ventured to appear in print it was stripped of its most notable adornments. Yet this apparent advantage was in reality a great disadvantage. As Mr. Matthew Arnold admirably says, "born in the same year with Milton, Gray would have been another man; born in the same year with Burns, he would have been another man." As it was, his genius pined away for want of movement in the atmosphere; the wells of poetry were stagnant, and there was no angel to strike the waters.

The amiable dispute as to the merits of *Agrippina* led the friends on to a wider theme, the peculiar qualities of the style of Shakspeare. How low the standard of criticism had fallen in that generation may be estimated when we consider that Theobald, himself the editor and annotator of Shakspeare, in palming off his forgery of *The Double Falsehood*, which contains such writing as this—

"Fond Echo, forego the light strain,  
And heedfully hear a lost maid;  
Go tell the false ear of the swain  
How deeply his vows have betrayed"—

as a genuine work by the author of *Hamlet*, had vent to appeal to the style as giving the best evidence of truth of his pretensions. Gray had a more delicate of literary flavour than this, and his remarks about vigour and pictorial richness of Elizabethan drama, which "our language has greatly degenerated," are interesting even to a modern reader. Through April and May he kept up a brisk correspondence, chiefly on business with West at Popes, and on the 5th of the latter month he received from his friend an *Ode to May*, beginning

"Dear Gray, that always in my heart  
Possessest still the better part"—

which is decidedly the most finished of West's productions. Some of the stanzas of this ode possess a suavity and grace:

"Awake, in all thy glories drest,  
Recall the zephyrs from the west;  
Restore the sun, revive the skies;  
At mine and Nature's call arise!  
Great Nature's self upbraids thy stay,  
And misses her accustomed May."

This is almost in the later style of Gray himself; the poem received from him commendation as being "elegant and genteel," a phrase that sounds curiously old-fashioned nowadays. Gray meanwhile is busy translating Propertius and shows no sign of application to legal studies. On the contrary, he has spent the month of April in studying the *Peloponnesian War*, the greater part of Pliny and Ma-

Anacreon, Petrarch, and Aulus Gellius, a range of reading which must have entirely excluded Coke upon Lyttelton. West's last letter is dated May 11, 1742, and is very cheerfully written, but closes with words that afterwards took a solemn meaning: "Vale, et vive paulisper cum vivis." On the 27th of the same month Gray wrote a very long letter to West, in which he shows no consciousness whatever of his friend's desperate condition. This epistle contains an interesting reference to his own health:

"Mine, you are to know, is a white melancholy, or rather leucocoly, for the most part; which, though it seldom laughs or dances, nor ever amounts to what one calls joy or pleasure, yet is a good, easy sort of a state, and *ça ne laisse que de s'amuser*. The only fault is its rapidity, which is apt now and then to give a sort of *ennui*, which makes one form certain little wishes that signify nothing. But there is another sort, black indeed, which I have now and then felt, that has somewhat in it like Tertullian's rule of faith, *Credo quia impossibile est*; for it believes, nay, is sure of everything that is unlikely, so it be but frightful; and on the other hand excludes and shuts its eyes to the most possible hopes, and everything that is pleasurable. From this the Lord deliver us! for none but He and sunshiny weather can do it."

Grimly enough, whilst he was thus analyzing his feelings, his friend lay at the point of death. Five days after this letter was written West breathed his last, on the 1st of June, 1742, in the twenty-sixth year of his age, and was buried in the chancel of Hatfield church.

Probably on the same day that West died Gray went down into Buckinghamshire, to visit his uncle and aunt Rogers at Stoke-Pogis, a village which his name has immortalized, and of which it may now be convenient to say a few words. The manor of Stoke Pogis or Poges is first mentioned in a deed of 1291, and passed through the hands of a variety of eminent personages down to the

great Earl of Huntingdon, in the reign of Henry The village, if such it can be called, is sparsely set over a wide extent of country. The church, a very picturesque structure of the fourteenth century, with a tall spire, is believed to have been built by Sir John Manners about 1340. It stands on a little level space about two miles north of the Thames at Eton. From the neighbourhood of the church no vestige of hamlet or village is visible, and the aspect of the place is slightly artificial, like a rustic church in a park on the stage. The tourist almost expects to see the grateful peasantry of an ancient manor cheerfully habited, make their appearance, dancing in a ring on the greensward. As he faces the church from the south, a white building, extravagantly Palladian, which lies between the meadows on his left hand, is Stoke Park, begun in the direction of Alexander Nasmyth, the landscape painter, in 1789, and finished by James Wyatt, R.A., for the Earl of Thomas Penn, who bought the manor from the representatives of Gray's friend, Lady Cobham. At the bottom of the hill the visitor stands a heavy and hideous mausoleum, containing a eulogistic inscription to Gray, and this also was built to the taste of Wyatt, and was erected in 1799. The ruins still remain on the south side of the church-yard, and the chimneys seen through the thick, umbrageous foliage on our right hand, and behind the church, are those of the ancient Manor House, celebrated by Gray in the *Story*, and built by the Earl of Huntingdon in the sixteenth century. The road from Farnham Royal passes close to it, but it is little to be seen. Although in Gray's time it would have been in perfect preservation as an exquisite specimen of Tudor architecture, with its high gables, projecting windows, and stacks of clustered chimney-shafts, it did not suit the corrupt Georgian taste of the Penns, and



Gray had been resident but very few days at Pogis before he wrote the poem with which his papers usually open, his *Ode to Spring*. Amongst them at Pembroke there occurs a copy of this poem, in handwriting, entitled *Noon-Tide: an Ode*; and in the margin of it there is found this interesting note: "beginning of June, 1742, sent to Fav: not knowing he was then dead." Favonius was the familiar name of West, and this shows that Gray received no intimation of his friend's approaching end, and no summons to his bedside. The loss of West was one of the most painful that his reserved nature ever suffered; when that loss was mentioned to him, nearly thirty years afterwards, he became visibly agitated, and to the end of his life he seemed to feel in the death of West "the affliction of his recent loss." We are therefore not surprised to find the *Ode to Spring*, which belongs to a previous condition of things, lighter in tone, colder in sentiment, and more formal in conception than his other serious productions. Some are annoyed that, in the very outset, he should borrow from Milton his "rosy-bosomed Hours," and from Spenser his "purple year." Again, there is a perplexing contrast of tone from the beginning, where he was perhaps inspired by that exquisite strain of florid fancy, the *Pervigil Veneris*, to the stoic moralizings of the later stanzas.

" How vain the ardour of the crowd,  
How low, how little are the proud,  
How indigent the great!"

It may be noted, by-the-way, that for many years the last two adjectives, now so happily placed, were awkwardly transposed. The best stanza, without doubt, is the penultimate:

"To Contemplation's sober eye  
Such is the race of man :  
And they that creep and they that fly  
Shall end where they began.  
Alike the busy and the gay  
But flutter through life's little day,  
In Fortune's varying colours drest :  
Brush'd by the hand of rough Mischance  
Or chill'd by age, their airy dance  
They leave, in dust to rest "

The final stanza, with its "glittering female," and its "painted plumage," is puerile in its attempted excess of simplicity, and errs, though in more fantastic language, exactly as such crude studies of Wordsworth's as *Andrew Jones* or *The Two Thieves* erred half a century later. Nothing was gained by the poet's describing himself "a solitary fly" without a hive to go to. The mistake was one which Gray never repeated, but it is curious to find two of the most sublime poets in our language, both specially eminent for loftiness of idea, beginning by eschewing all reasonable dignity of expression.

But, although the *Ode to Spring* no longer forms a favourite part of Gray's poetical works, it possessed considerable significance in 1742, and particularly on account of its form. It was the first note of protest against the hard versification which had reigned in England for more than sixty years. The Augustan age seems to have suffered from a dulness of ear, which did not permit it to detect a rhyme unless it rang at the close of the very next pause. Hence, in the rare cases where a lyric movement was employed, the ordinary octosyllabic couplet took the place of those versatile measures in which the Elizabethan and Jacobite poets had delighted. Swift, Lady Winchelsea, Parnell, Philips, and Green, the five poets of the be-

ginning of the eighteenth century who rebelled against the heroic verse, got no farther in metrical innovation than the shorter and more ambling couplet. Dyer, in his greatly overrated piece called *Grongar Hill*, followed the lead of his predecessors. But Gray, from the very first, showed a disposition to return to more national forms, and to work out his stanzas on a more harmonic principle. He seems to have disliked the facility of the couplet, and the vagueness of length to which it might be repeated. His view of a poem was, that it should have a vertebrate form, which should respond, if not absolutely to its subject, at least to its mood. In short, he was a genuine lyrist, and our literature had possessed none since Milton and the last Cavalier song-writers. Yet his stanzas are built up from very simple materials. Here, in the *Ode to Spring*, we begin with a quatrain of the common ballad measure; an octosyllabic couplet is added, and this would close with a rustic effect, were the music not prolonged by the addition of three lines more, whilst the stanza closes gracefully with a short line of six syllables.

The news of the death of West deepened Gray's vein of poetry, but did not stop its flow. He poured forth his grief and affection in some impassioned hexameters full of earnest feeling, which he afterwards tried, ineptly enough, to tack on to the icy periods of his *De Principiis Cogitandi*. In no other of his writings does Gray employ quite the same personal and emotional accents, in none does he speak out so plainly from the heart, and with so little attention to his singing robes :

“ Vidi egomet duro graviter concussa dolore  
Pectora, in alterius non unquam lenta dolorem ;  
Et languere oculos vidi, et pallescere amantem  
Vultum, quo nunquam Pietas nisi rara, Fidesque,

*Altus amor Veri, et purum spirabat Honestum.  
Visa tamen tardi demum inclementia morbi  
Censere est, reducemque iterum roseo ore Salutem  
Speravi, atque una tecum, dilecte Favoni !"*

This fragment, the most attractive of his Latin poems, trips on a tag from Propertius, and suddenly ceases, nor is there extant any later effusion of Gray's in the same language. He celebrated the death of Favonius in another piece, which is far more familiar to general readers. The MS. of this sonnet, now at Cambridge, is marked "at Stoke: Aug. 1742;" it was not published till Mason included it in his *Memoirs*:

"In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,  
And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire;  
The birds in vain their amorous descant join,  
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire;  
These ears, alas! for other notes repine,  
A different object do these eyes require;  
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine,  
And in my breast th' imperfect joys expire.  
Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,  
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men;  
The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;  
To warm their little loves the birds complain;  
I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,  
And weep the more because I weep in vain."

This little composition has suffered a sort of notoriety from the fact that Wordsworth, in 1800, selected it as an example of the errors of an ornate style, doing so because, as he frankly admitted, "Gray stands at the head of those who by their reasonings have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt prose and metrical composition, and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction." Wordsworth

declares that out of the fourteen lines of his poem five are of any value, namely, the sixth, seventh, eighth, thirteenth, and fourteenth, the language of which "differs in no respect from that of prose." But this does not appear to be particularly ingenuous. If we allow that to be called Phœbus, and if we pardon the "green atmosphere" there is not a single expression in the sonnet which is fantastic or pompous. It is simplicity itself in comparison with most of Milton's sonnets, and it seems as though Wordsworth might have found an instance of false grandiloquence much fitter to his hand in Young, or even still in Armstrong, master of those who go about with a hat a "swart sombrero." Gray's graceful sonnet is plainly the result of his late study of Petrarch, and it may remind ourselves, in this age of flourishing sonnets, that it is almost the only specimen of its class that has been written in English for a hundred years, certainly the only one that is still read with pleasure. One other thing may be noted, that in this little poem Gray first began to practise the quatrain of alternate heroics, which later became, as we shall see, the basis of all his harmonious effects, and which he learned to fashion with more skill than any other poet before or since.

In the same month of August was written the *Ode on the Distant Prospect of Eton College*, or, as in Gray's own words, which I have examined, of *Eton College, Windsor, and the adjacent country*. East and west from the church of Stoke-Pogis, towards Stoke Green in the one direction and towards Farnham Royal in the other, there rises a gentle acclivity, from which the ground gradually descends southward to the Thames, and which lies opposite to the "distant spires" and "antique towers" which Gray has sung in melodious numbers. The woodland parish

Stoke is full of little rights-of-way, meadow-paths without hedges that skirt the breast of the ridge I speak of, and reveal against the southern sky the embattled outline of Windsor. The *Eton Ode* is redolent of Stoke-Pogis, and to have snattered where Gray himself must have muttered his verses as they took shape gives the reader a certain sense of confidence in the poet's sincerity. Gray had of late been much exercised about Eton; to see a place so full of reminiscences, and yet be too distant to have news of it, this was provoking to his fancy. In his last letter to West he starts the reflection that he developed a few months later in the *Ode*. It puzzled him to think that Lord Sandwich and Lord Halifax, whom he could remember as "dirty boys playing at cricket," were now statesmen, whilst, "as for me, I am never a bit the older, nor the bigger, nor the wiser than I was then, no, not for having been beyond the sea." Lord Sandwich, of course, as all readers of lampoons remember, remained Gray's pet aversion to the end of his life, the type to him of the man who, without manners, or parts, or character, could force his way into power by the sheer insolence of wealth. The *Eton Ode* was inspired by the regret that the illusions of boyhood, the innocence that comes not of virtue but of inexperience, the sweetness born not of a good heart but of a good digestion, the elation which childish spirits give, and which owes nothing to anger or dissipation, that these simple qualities cannot be preserved through life. Gray was, or thought he was, "never a bit the older" than he was at Eton, and it seemed to him that the world would be better if Lord Sandwich could have been kept forever in the same infantile simplicity. This description of the joyous innocence of boyhood—a theme requiring, indeed, the optimism of a Pangloss—has never been surpassed as

an *ex parte* statement on the roseate and ideal side of the question. That the view of ethics is quite elementary would have done honour to the experience and science of one of Gray's good old aunts, detracts in no sense from the positive beauty of the poem as a strain of reflection, and it has enjoyed a popularity with successive generations which puts it almost outside the pale of verbal criticism. When a short ode of one hundred lines has enriched the language with at least three phrases which have become part and parcel of our daily speech, it may be taken for granted that it is very admirably worded. Indeed the *Eton Ode* is one of those poems which have suffered from a continued excess of popularity, and its famous felicities "to snatch a fearful joy," "regardless of their doom little victims play," "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," have suffered the extreme degradation as well as the loftiest honour which attends on passages of natural verse, since they have been so universally extolled that they have finally become commonplace witticisms to the modern generation. It is well to take the stanza in which such a phrase occurs and read it anew, with a determination to forget that one of its lines has been almost effaced in vulgar traffic.

"While some on earnest business bent  
 Their murmuring labours ply  
 'Gainst graver hours that bring constraint  
 To sweeten liberty,  
 Some bold adventurers disdain  
 The limits of their little reign,  
 And unknown regions dare descry;  
 Still as they run they look behind,  
 They hear a voice in every wind,  
 And snatch a fearful joy."

It is only in the second stanza of the *Eton Ode* that Gray permits himself to refer to the constant pressure

regret for his lost friend; the fields are beloved in vain, and, in Wordsworth's exquisite phrase, he turns to share the rapture—ah! with whom? In yet one other poem composed during this prolific month of August, 1742, that regret serves simply to throw a veil of serious and pathetic sentiment over the tone of the reflection. The *Ode on Adversity*, so named by Gray himself and by his first editor, Mason, but since styled, I know not why, the *Hymn to Adversity*, is remarkable as the first of Gray's poems in which he shows that stateliness of movement and pomp of allegorical illustration which give an individuality in his mature style. No English poet, except perhaps Milton and Shelley, has maintained the same severe elevation throughout a long lyrical piece. Perhaps the fragments of such lyristæ as Simonides gave Gray the hint of this pure and cold manner of writing. The shadowy personages of allegory throng around us, and we are not certain that we distinguish them from one another. The indifferent critic may be supposed to ask, which is Prosperity and which is Folly, and how am I to distinguish them from the Summer Friend and from Thoughtless Joy? Adversity herself is an abstraction which has few terrors and few allurements for us, and in listening to the address made to her by the poet we are apt to forget her in our appreciation of the balanced rhythm and rich, persuasive sound:

“Wisdom, in sable garb arrayed,  
Immersed in rapt’rous thought profound;  
And Melancholy, silent maid,  
With leaden eye that loves the ground,  
Still on thy solemn steps attend,  
Warm Charity, the general friend,  
With Justice, to herself severe,  
And Pity, dropping soft the sadly pleasing tear.



"O gently on thy suppliant's head,  
 Dread goddess, lay thy chast'ning hand!  
 Not in thy Gorgon terrors clad,  
 Not circled with the vengeful band  
 (As by the impious thou art seen),  
 With thund'ring voice, and threat'ning mien,  
 With screaming Horror's funeral cry,  
 Despair, and fell Disease, and ghastly Poverty.

"Thy form benign, O goddess, wear;  
 Thy milder influence impart,  
 Thy philosophic train be there,  
 To soften, not to wound, my heart.  
 The gen'rous spark extinct revive,  
 Teach me to love, and to forgive,  
 Exact my own defects to scan,  
 What others are to feel, and know myself a man."

This last stanza, where he gets free from the allegorical personages, is undoubtedly the best; and the curious let about the "generous spark" seems to me to be only a reference to the quarrel with Walpole. If the thought fantastic, it must be remembered that Gray's circle of experience and emotion was unusually narrow. In return to the treatment of allegory and the peculiarities of this ode, we are confronted by the curious fact that it seems impossible to claim for these qualities, hitherto unobserved in English poetry, precedency in either Gray or Collins. Actual priority, of course, belongs to Gray. Collins wrote nothing of a serious nature till 1746; but his *Odes*, though so similar, or rather so analogous, to Gray's that every critic has considered them as holding a distinct place together in literature, were only published not in any way inspired by Gray. The latter published nothing till 1747, whereas in December, 1746, Collins's precious little volume saw the light.

It is difficult to believe that Collins, at school at Winchester until 1741, at college at Oxford until 1744, could have seen any of Gray's verses, which had not then begun to circulate in MS., in the way in which long afterwards the *Elegy* and the *Bard* passed from eager hand to hand. We shall see that Gray read Collins eventually, but without interest, whilst Collins does not appear to have been ever conscious of Gray's existence; there was no magnetic attraction between the two poets, and we must suppose their extraordinary kinship to have been a mere accident, the result of certain forces acting simultaneously on more or less similar intellectual compounds. There was no other resemblance between them, as men, than this one gift of clear, pure, Simonidean song. Collins was simply a reed, cut short and notched by the great god Pan, for the production of enchanting flute-melodies at intervals; but for all other human purposes a vain and empty thing indeed. In Gray the song, important as it was, seemed merely one phase of a deep and consistent character, of a brain almost universally accomplished, of a man, in short, and not of a mere musical instrument.

One more work of great importance was begun at Stoke in the autumn of 1742, the *Elegy wrote in a Country Church yard*. It is, unfortunately, impossible to say what form it originally took, or what lines or thoughts now existing in it are part of the original scheme. We shall examine this poem at length when we reach the period of Gray's career to which it belongs in its completed form; but as the question is often asked, and vaguely answered, where was the *Elegy* written, it may at once be said that it was begun at Stoke in October or November, 1742, continued at Stoke immediately after the funeral of Gray's aunt, Miss Mary Ambrose, in November,

pulled down in 1780. Wyatt refused to have anything to say to it, and remarked that "the style of the edifice was deficient in those excellences which might have pleaded for restoration." Of the historical building in which Sir Christopher Hatton lived and Sir Edward Coke died nothing is left but the fantastic chimneys, and a rough shell which is used as a stable. This latter was for some time fitted up as a studio for Sir Edwin Landseer, and he was working here in 1852, when he suddenly became deranged. This old ruin, so full of memories, is only one of a number of ancient and curious buildings within the boundaries of the parish of Stoke-Pogis. When Gray came to Stoke, in 1742, the Manor House was inhabited by the Ranger of Windsor Forest, Viscount Cobham, who died in 1749. It was his widow who, as we shall presently see, became the intimate friend of Gray and inspired his remarkable poem of the *Long Story*.

The house of Mrs. Rogers, to which Gray and his mother now proceeded, was situated at West End, in the northern part of the parish. It was reached from the church by a path across the meadows, along side the hospital, a fine brick building of the sixteenth century, and so by the lane leading out into Stoke Common. Just at the end of this lane, on the left-hand side, looking southwards, with the common at its back, stood West End House, a simple farmstead of two stories, with a rustic porch before the front door, and this was Gray's home for many years. It is now thoroughly altered and enlarged, and no longer contains any mark of its original simplicity. The charm of the house to the poet must have been that Burnham Beeches, Stoke Common, and Brockhurst Woods were all at hand, and within reach of the most indolent of pedestrians.

Italy; it consisted of nine large volumes, bound in vellum, and was enriched by a variety of notes in Gray's handwriting.

It was at Florence, on the 12th of March, 1740, that Gray took it into his head to commence a correspondence with his old school-fellow, Dr. Thomas Wharton ("my dear, dear Wharton, which is a 'dear' more than I give anybody else"), who afterwards became Fellow of Pembroke Hall, and one of Gray's staunchest and most sympathetic friends. To the biographer of the poet, moreover, the name of Wharton must be ever dear, since it was to him that the least reserved and most personal of all Gray's early letters were indited. This Dr. Wharton was a quiet, good man, with no particular genius or taste, but dowered with that delightful tact and sympathetic attraction which are the lode-star of irritable and weary genius. He was by a few months Gray's junior, and survived him three-and-twenty years, indolently intending, it is said, to the last, to collect his memories of his great friend, but dying in his eightieth year so suddenly as to be incapable of any preparation. In this, his first letter to Wharton, Gray mentions the death of Pope Clement XII., which had occurred about a month before, and states his intention to be at Rome in time to see the coronation of his successor, which, however, as it happened, was delayed six months. So little, however, were Walpole and Gray prepared for this, that they set out in the middle of March, 1740, in great fear lest they should be too late, and entered Rome on the 31st of that month. They found the conclave of cardinals sitting and like to sit; and they prepared themselves to enjoy Rome in the mean while. The magnificence of the ancient city infinitely surpassed Gray's expectation, but he found modern Rome and its inhabitants very con-

simile to represent. . . . Imagine, I say, all this transacted by cracked voices, trilling divisions upon two notes-and-a-half, accompanied by an orchestra of humstrums, and a whole house more attentive than if Farinelli sung, and you will almost have formed a just idea of the thing." And again, later, he writes: "Des miaulemens et des heurlemens effroyables, mêlés avec un tintamarre du diable—voilà la musique Française en abrégé." At first the weather was extremely bad, but in May they began to enjoy the genial climate; they took long excursions to Versailles and Chantilly, happy "to walk by moonlight, and hear the ladies and the nightingales sing."

On the 1st of June, in company with Henry Conway, Walpole and Gray left Paris and settled at Rheims for three exquisite summer months. I fancy that these were amongst the happiest weeks in Gray's life, the most sunny and unconcerned. As the three friends came with particular introductions from Lord Conway, who knew Rheims well, they were welcomed with great cordiality into all the best society of the town. Gray found the provincial assemblies very stately and graceful, but without the easy familiarity of Parisian manners. The mode of entertainment was uniform, beginning with cards, in the midst of which every one rose to eat what was called the *gouter*, a service of fruits, cream, sweetmeats, crawfish, and cheese. People then sat down again to cards, until they had played forty deals, when they broke up into little parties for a promenade. That this formality was sometimes set aside we may gather from a very little vignette that Gray slips into a letter to his mother:

"The other evening we happened to be got together in a company of eighteen people, men and women of the best fashion here, at a garden in the town, to walk, when one of the ladies bethought herself

"O gently on thy suppliant's head,  
 Dread goddess, lay thy chast'ning hand!  
 Not in thy Gorgon terrors clad,  
 Not circled with the vengeful band  
 (As by the impious thou art seen),  
 With thund'ring voice, and threat'ning mien,  
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"Thy form benign, O goddess, wear;  
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1749, and finished at Cambridge in June, 1750. may here be remarked as a very singular fact the death of a valued friend seems to have been the source of greatest efficacy in rousing Gray to the composition of poetry, and did in fact excite him to the completion of most of his important poems. He was a man who held a very slender hold on life himself, who walked barefoot in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and whose greatest vitality were those in which bereavement proved to him that, melancholy as he was, even death was something to lose and to regret.

It is, therefore, perhaps more than a strong impression that makes me conjecture the beginning of the *Woe* wrote in a *Country Church-yard* to date from the death of Gray's uncle, Jonathan Rogers, who died at Pogis on the 31st of October, 1742, and who was buried with the Antrobus family in the church of the neighbouring parish of Burnham. An ingenious Latin inscription to him, in a marble tablet in the church of that parish has always been ascribed to Gray himself. Rogers was at the age of sixty-five, having spent thirty-two years of his life in disturbed felicity with his wife, born Anna Antrobus, who survived him till near the end of her celebrated and long life. The death of Mr. Rogers completely altered the prospects. Mrs. Rogers appears to have been left with a very small fortune, just enough to support her and her two sisters, Mrs. Gray and Miss Antrobus, in genteel comfort, if they shared a house together, and had no extraordinary expenses. The ladies from Cornhill accordingly removed down to West End House at Stoke, and there the two sisters lived until their respective deaths. But the dream of a life of lettered ease was at an end; and that what would support these ladies would leave



the margin for him. His temperament and his mode of study shut him out from every energetic profession. He was twenty five years of age, and hitherto had not so much as begun any serious study of the law, for which his mother still imagined him to be preparing. Only one course was open to him, namely, to return to Cambridge, where living was very cheap, and to reside in college, spending his vacations quietly at Stoke Pogis. As Mason puts it, "he was too delicate to hurt two persons for whom he had so tender an affection by peremptorily declaring his real intentions, and therefore changed, or pretended to change, the line of his study." Henceforward, until 1759, his whole life was a regular oscillation between Stoke and Cambridge, varied only by occasional visits to London. The first part of his life was now over. At twenty five Gray becomes a middle-aged man, and loses, among the libraries of the University, his last pretensions to physical elasticity. From this time forward we find that his ailments, his melancholy, his reserve, and his habit of drowning consciousness in perpetual study, have taken firm hold upon him, and he begins to plunge into an excess of reading, treating the acquisition of knowledge as a narcotic. In the winter of 1742 he proceeded to Peterhouse, and taking his bachelor's degree in Civil Law, was forthwith installed as a resident of that college.

## CHAPTER IV.

### LIFE AT CAMBRIDGE.

GRAY took up his abode at Peterhouse, in the room nearest the road on the second floor on the north side, a room which still exists, and which commands a fine view of Pembroke College, further east, on the opposite side of Trumpington Street. It would seem, indeed, that Gray's eyes and thoughts were forever away from home, even when paying a visit to the society across the road. His letters are full of minute discussions of what is going on at Cambridge, but never a word of Peterhouse; indeed, so rarely and commonly does he discuss the politics of his former college, often without naming it, that all his biographers—except, of course, Mason—seem to have taken for granted that he was describing Peterhouse. Enough, Mason, who might have explained this circumstance in half a dozen words, does not appear to have noticed the fact, so natural did it seem to him to talk about events which went on in his own college of Cambridge. Nor is it explained why Gray never became a Fellow of Peterhouse. In all the correspondence of Gray I have only noted one solitary instance in which he mentioned a Petrusian; on this one occasion he mentions the name the Master, J. Whalley, afterwards Bishop of Exeter, in connexion with an anecdote which does more

our to him as a kind old soul than as a disciplinarian. But all Gray's friends, and enemies, and interests were centered in Pembroke, and he shows such an intimate knowledge of all the cabals and ridiculous little intrigues which thrilled the common-room of that college, as requires an explanation that now can never be given. These first years of his residence are the most obscure in his whole career. It must be remembered that of his three most intimate correspondents one, West, was dead; another, Walpole, estranged; and the third, Wharton, a resident in Cambridge like himself, and therefore too near at hand to be written to. On the 27th of December, 1742, a few years after his arrival at the University, he wrote a letter to Dr. Wharton, which has been preserved, and his *Hymn to Ignorance*, Mason tells us, dates from the same time. But after this he entirely disappears from us for a couple of years, a few legends of the direction taken by his studies and his schemes of literary work being the only glimpses we get of him.

But although Gray tells us nothing about his own college, it is still possible to form a tolerably distinct idea of the society with whom he moved at Pembroke. The Master, Dr. Roger Long, was a man of parts, but full of eccentricities, and gifted with a very disagreeable temper. He was a species of poetaster, oddly associated in verse, at different extremes of his long life, with Laurence Eusden, the poet laureate, and the great Erasmus Darwin. When Gray settled in the University, Roger Long was sixty-two years of age, had been Master of Pembroke nine years, and, after being appointed Lowndes Professor of Astronomy in 1750, was to survive until 1770, dying in his ninety-first year. He was fond of exercising his invention on lumbering constructions, which provoked the ridi-

cule of young wits like Gray; such as a sort of which he built in the north-eastern corner of the court of Pembroke; and a still more remarkable velocipede, upon which Dr. Long was wont to about in Pembroke basin, "like a wild goose heedless of mocking undergraduates. This eccentric sonage was the object of much observation on the Gray, who frequently mentioned him in his letters. He was delighted when any new absurdity gave him opportunity of writing to his correspondents about "the and mighty Prince Roger surnamed the Long, Lord of the great Zodiac, the glass Uranium, and the Chariot thereof without horses." As the astronomer grew older he became more and more lost his authority with the Fellows, and describes scenes of absolute rebellion which are, I believe, recorded by no other historian. Gray was, undoubtedly, in possession of information denied to the rest of the world. Part of this information came, we cannot doubt, from Dr. Wharton, and part from another intimate friend of Gray's, William Trollope, who had taken his degree in 1730, and who was one of the senior Fellows of Pembroke. Another excellent friend of Gray's, also a leading figure in Pembroke, was the gentle and refined Dr. James Oglethorpe, who eventually succeeded Long in the Mastership, and whose arms Gray died. Outside this little Pembroke circle Gray had few associates. He knew Conyers Middleton very well, and seems to have gained, a little while haunting the rich library of Emmanuel College, the acquaintance of a man whose influence on him was distinctly hurtful, the satellite of Warburton, Richard Ouseley, long afterwards Bishop of Worcester. But his association with Conyers Middleton, certainly one of the most remarkable men then moving in the University, amounted

to friendship. They probably met nearly every day, Middleton being Librarian of Trinity. There was much that Gray would find sympathetic in the broad theology of Middleton, who had won his spurs by attacking the deists from ground almost as sceptical as their own, yet strictly within the pale of orthodoxy; nor would the irony and free thought of a champion of the Church of England be shocking to Gray, whose own tenets were at this time no less broad than his hatred of an open profession of deism was pronounced. Gray's feeling in religion seems to have been one of high and dry objection to enthusiasm, or change, or subversion. He was willing to admit a certain breadth of conjecture, so long as the forms of orthodoxy were preserved, but he objected excessively to any attempt to tamper with those forms, collecting Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Hume under one general category of abhorrence. As he says, in a cancelled stanza of one of his poems—

" No more, with reason and thyself at strife,  
Give anxious cares and endless wishes room;  
But through the cool, sequestered vale of life  
Pursue the silent tenour of thy doom"—

an attitude which would not preclude a good deal of sympathy with the curious speculations of Conyers Middleton.

There is no doubt, however, that, in spite of a few companions of this class, most of them, like Middleton, much older than himself, he found Cambridge exceedingly dreary. He talks in one of his letters of "the strong attachment, or rather allegiance, which I and all here owe to our sovereign lady and mistress, the president of presidents, and head of heads (if I may be permitted to pronounce her name, that ineffable Octogrammaton), the power of *Luzi-*

ness. You must know that she has been pleased to appoint me (in preference to so many old servants of hers who had spent their whole lives in qualifying themselves for the office) Grand Picker of Straws and Push-pin Player in ordinary to her Supinity." This in 1744, and the same note had been struck two years earlier in his curiously splenetic *Hymn to Ignorance* :

"Hail, horrors, hail! ye ever gloomy bowers,  
Ye Gothic fancies, and antiquated towers,  
Where rushy Camus' slowly winding flood  
Perpetual draws his humid train of mud :  
Glad I revisit thy neglected reign.  
O take me to thy peaceful shade again."

This atmosphere of apathy and ignorance was by no means favourable to the composition of poetry. It was indeed, absolutely fatal to it, and being at liberty to write odes any hour of any day completely took away from the poet the inclination to compose them at all. The flow of verse which had been so full and constant in 1742 ceased abruptly and entirely, and his thoughts turned in a wholly fresh direction. He gave himself up almost exclusively for the first four or five years to a consecutive study of the whole existing literature of ancient Greece. If he had seen cause to lament the deadness of classical enterprise at Cambridge when he was an undergraduate, this lethargy had become still more universal since the death of Bentley and Snape. Gray insisted, almost in solitude, on the necessity of persistence in the cultivation of Greek literature, and he forms the link between the school of humanism which flourished in Cambridge in the beginning of the eighteenth century and that of which Porson was to be the representative.

One of Gray's earliest schemes was a critical text of

Strabo, an author of whom he knew no satisfactory edition. Amongst the Pembroke MSS. may still be found his painstaking and copious notes collected for this purpose, and Mason possessed in Gray's handwriting "a great number of geographical disquisitions, particularly with respect to that part of Asia which comprehends Persia and India; concerning the ancient and modern names and divisions of which extensive countries his notes are very copious." This edition of Strabo never came to the birth, and the same has to be said of his projected Plato, the notes for every section of which were in existence when Mason came to examine his papers. Another labour over which he toiled in vain was a text of the Greek Anthology, with translations of each separate epigram into Latin elegiac verse, a task on which he wasted months of valuable time, and which he then abandoned. His MS., however, of this last-mentioned work came into his executors' hands, copied out as if for the press, with the addition, even, of a very full index, and it is a little surprising that Mason should not have hastened to oblige the world of classical students with a work which would have had a value at that time that it could not be said to possess nowadays. Lord Chesterfield confidently "recommends the Greek epigrams to the supreme contempt" of his precious son, and in so doing gauged rightly enough the taste of the age. It would seem that Gray had the good-sense to enjoy the delicious little poems of Meleager and his fellow-singers, but had not moral energy enough to insist on forcing them upon the attention of the world. He lamented, too, the neglect into which Aristotle had fallen, and determined to restore him to the notice of English scholars. As in the previous cases, however, his intentions remained unfulfilled, and we turn with pleasure from the consideration of all

this melancholy waste of energy and learning. It is hard to conceive of a sadder irony on the career of a scholar of Gray's genius and accomplishment than is given by the dismal contents of the so-called second volume of his *Works*, published by Mathias in 1814, fragments and jottings which bear the same relation to literature that dough bears to bread.

The unfortunate difference with Horace Walpole came to a close in the winter of 1744. A lady, probably Mrs. Conyers Middleton, made peace between the friends. Walpole expressed a desire that Gray would write to him, and as Gray was passing through London, on his way from Cambridge to Stoke, in the early part of November, a meeting came off. The poet wrote Walpole a note as soon as he arrived, "and immediately received a very civil answer." Horace Walpole was then living in the ministerial neighbourhood of Arlington Street, and thither on the following evening Gray went to visit him. Gray's account to Wharton of the interview is entertaining: "I was somewhat abashed at his confidence; he came to meet me, kissed me on both sides with all the ease of one who receives an acquaintance just come out of the country, squatted me into a fauteuil, began to talk of the town, and this and that and t'other, and continued with little interruption for three hours, when I took my leave, very indifferently pleased, but treated with monstrous good-breeding. I supped with him next night, as he desired. Ashton was there, whose formalities tickled me inwardly, for he, I found, was to be angry about the letter I had wrote him. However, in going home together our hackney-coach jumbled us up into a sort of reconciliation. . . . Next morning I breakfasted alone with Mr. Walpole; when we had all the *éclaircissement* I ever expected, and I left him much



better satisfied than I had been hitherto." Gray's pride we see struggling against a very hearty desire in Walpole to let by-gones be by-gones; the stately little poet, however, was not able to hold out against so many courteous seductions, and he gradually returned to his old intimacy and affection for Walpole. It is nevertheless doubtful whether he ever became so fond of the latter as Walpole was of him. He accepted the homage, however, to the end of his days, and was more admired, perhaps, by Horace Walpole, and for a longer period, than any other person.

Perhaps in consequence of the "*éclaircissement*" with Walpole, Gray began at this time a correspondence with Mr. Chute and Mr. Whithead, the gentlemen with whom he had spent some months in Venice. Chute was a Hampshire squire, a dozen years senior to Gray and Walpole, but a great admirer of them both, and they both wrote to him some of their brightest letters. Chute was what our Elizabethan forefathers called "Italianate;" he sympathized with Gray's tastes in music and statuary, and vowed that life was not worth living north of the Alps, and spent the greater part of his time in Casa Ambrosio, Sir Horace Mann's house in Florence. He was an accomplished person, who played and sang, and turned a neat copy of verses, and altogether was a very agreeable exception amongst country gentlemen. He lived on until 1776, carefully preserving the letters he had interchanged with his sprightly friends.

About this time (May 30, 1744) Pope had died, and both Gray and Walpole refer frequently to the circumstance in their letters. It seems that Gray had had at least one interview with the great poet of the age before him, an interview the date of which it would be curious to ascertain. Gray's words are interesting. He writes to

Walpole (Feb. 3, 1746), referring probably to the scandals about Atossa and the *Patriot King*: "I can say no more for Mr. Pope, for what you keep in reserve may be worse than all the rest. It is natural to wish the finest writer—one of them—we ever had should be an honest man. It is for the interest even of that virtue, whose friend he professed himself, and whose beauties he sung, that he should not be found a dirty animal. But, however, this is Mr. Warburton's business, not mine, who may scribble his pen to the stumps and all in vain, if these facts are so. *It is not from what he told me about himself* that I thought well of him, but from a humanity and goodness of heart, ay, and greatness of mind, that runs through his private correspondence, not less apparent than are a thousand little vanities and weaknesses mixed with those good qualities, for nobody ever took him for a philosopher." There exists a book in which Pope has written his own name, and Gray his underneath, with a date in Pope's lifetime. Evidently there had been personal intercourse between them, in which Walpole may have had a part; for the latter said, very late in his own career, "Remember, I have lived with Gray and seen Pope."

In 1744 appeared two poems of some importance in the history of eighteenth century literature, Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination* and Armstrong's *Art of Preserving Health*. Gray read them instantly, for the authors were friends of his friend Wharton. The first he found often obscure and even unintelligible, but yet in many respects admirable; and he checked himself in the act of criticising Akenside—"a very ingenious man, worth fifty of myself." For Armstrong he showed less interest. The reading of these and other poems, a fresh beat of the pulse of English Poetry in her fainting-fit, set him think-

ing of his own neglected epic, the *De Principiis Cogitandi*, or "Master Tommy Lucretius," as he nicknamed it. This unwieldy production, however, could not be encouraged to flourish: "'tis but a pulceing chitt," says its author, and Mason tells us that about this time the posthumous publication of the *Anti-Lucretius* of the Cardinal Melehiour de Polignac, a book long awaited and received at last with great disappointment, made Gray decide to let Locke and the Origin of Ideas alone. It may be noted that in July, 1745, Gray had serious thoughts, which came to nothing, of moving over from Peterhouse to Trinity Hall.

We get glimpses of him now and then from his letters. He does not entirely forget the pleasures of "strumming," he tells Chute; "I look at my music now and then, that I may not forget it;" and in September, 1746, he has been writing "a few autumnal verses," the exact nature of which it is now impossible to specify. In August of the same year he had been in London, spending his mornings with Walpole in Arlington Street, and his afternoons at the trial of the Jacobite Lords. His account of Kilmarnock and Cromartie is vivid, and not as unsympathetic as it might be. Now, as for many years to come, Gray usually went up to town in the middle of June, saw what was to be seen, proceeded to Stoke, and returned to Cambridge in September. Late in August, 1746, Horace Walpole took a house within the precincts of the Castle of Windsor, and Gray at Stoke found this very convenient, for the friends were able to spend one day of each week together. In May, 1747, Walpole rented, and afterwards bought, that estate on the north bank of the Thames which he has made famous under the name of Strawberry Hill, and in future Gray scarcely ever passed a long vacation without spending some of his time there. It was

now that his first poem was published. Walpole persuaded him to allow Dodsley to print the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, and it accordingly appeared anonymously, in the summer of 1747, as a thin folio pamphlet. In the autumn of this same year, whilst Gray was Walpole's guest at Strawberry Hill, he sat for the most pleasing, though the most feminine, of his portraits, that by John Giles Eckhardt, a German who had come over with Vanloo, and to whom Walpole had addressed his poem of *The Beauties*. The *Eton Ode* fell perfectly still-born, in spite of Walpole's enthusiasm; even less observed by the critics of the hour than Collins's little volume of *Odes*, which had appeared six months earlier. We may observe that Gray was now thirty years of age, and not only absolutely unknown, but not in the least persuaded in himself that he ought to be known.

It seems to have been about this time that the remarkable interview took place between Gray and Hogarth. The great painter, now in his fiftieth year, had just reached the summit of his reputation by completing his *Marriage à la Mode*, which Gray admired like the rest of the world. The vivacious Walpole thought that he would bring these interesting men together, and accordingly arranged a little dinner, from which he anticipated no small intellectual diversion. Unfortunately, Hogarth was more surly and egotistical than usual, and Gray was plunged in one of his fits of melancholy reserve, so that Walpole had to rely entirely upon his own flow of spirits to prevent absolute silence, and vowed at the end of the repast that he had never been so dull in his life. To show, however, how Gray could sparkle when the cloud happened to rise from off his spirits, we may quote entire the delightful letter to Walpole, in which one of the brightest of his lesser poems first appeared:

"Cambridge, March, 1, 1747.

"As one ought to be particularly careful to avoid blunders in a compliment of condolence, it would be a sensible satisfaction to me, before I testify my sorrow, and the sincere part I take in your misfortune, to know for certain who it is I lament. I knew Zara and Selima (Selima, was it? or Fatima?), or rather I knew them both together; for I cannot justly say which was which. Then as to your 'handsome Cat,' the name you distinguish her by, I am no less at a loss, as well knowing one's handsome cat is always the cat one loves best; or if one be alive and one dead, it is usually the latter that is the handsomest. Besides, if the point were never so clear, I hope you do not think me so ill-bred or so imprudent as to forfeit all my interest in the survivor; oh no! I would rather seem to mistake, and imagine to be sure it must be the tabby one that had met with this sad accident. Till this matter is a little better determined, you will excuse me if I do not begin to cry—

*"Tempus inane peto, requiem, spatiumque doloris."*

Which interval is the more convenient, as it gives me time to rejoice with you on your new honours [Walpole had just been elected F.R.S.]. This is only a beginning; I reckon next week we shall hear you are a Freemason, or a Gormagon at least. Heigh-ho! I feel (as you to be sure have long since) that I have very little to say, at least in prose. Somebody will be the better for it; I do not mean you, but your Cat, *feue Mademoiselle Selime*, whom I am about to immortalise for one week or fortnight, as follows:

"'Twas on a lofty vase's side  
Where China's gayest art had dyed  
The azure flowers that blow,  
The pensive Selima reclined,  
Demurest of the tabby kind,  
Gaz'd on the lake below.

"Her conscious tail her joy declar'd  
The fair, round face, the showy beard,  
The velvet of her paws,  
Her coat that with the tortoise vies,  
Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,  
She saw; and purred applause.

"Still had she gaz'd; but midst the tide  
Two beauteous forms were seen to glide,

The Genii of the stream ;  
Their scaly armour's Tyrian hue,  
Through richest purple, to the view  
Betray'd a golden gleam.

"The hapless nymph with wonder saw :  
A whisker first, and then a claw,  
With many an ardent wish.  
She stretch'd, in vain, to reach the prize.  
What female heart can gold despise ?  
What Cat's averse to fish ?

"Presumptuous maid ! With looks intent  
Again she stretched, again she bent,  
Nor knew the gulf between.  
(Malignant Fate sat by, and smil'd.)  
The slipp'ry verge her feet beguil'd,  
She tumbled headlong in.

"Eight times emerging from the flood,  
She mewed to ev'ry wat'ry god  
Some speedy aid to send.  
No dolphin came, no Nereid stirr'd,  
No cruel Tom nor Harry heard—  
What favourite has a friend ?

"From hence, ye beauties, undeceiv'd,  
Know one false step is ne'er retriev'd,  
And be with caution bold.  
Not all that tempts your wand'ring eyes  
And heedless hearts is lawful prize,  
Nor all, that glisters, gold.

"There's a poem for you ; it is rather too long for an epitaph."

It is rather too long for a quotation, also, but the reader may find some entertainment in seeing so familiar a poem restored to its original readings. Johnson's comment on this piece is more unfortunate than usual. He calls it "a trifle, but not a happy trifle." Later critics have been unanimous in thinking it one of the happiest of all trifles ; and there can be no doubt that in its ease and lightness it shows that Gray had been reading Gresset and Piron to advantage, and that he remembered the gay suppers with

Mlle. Quinault. A French poet of the neatest class, however, would certainly have avoided the specious little error detected by Johnson in the last line, and would not have laid himself open to the charge of supposing that what cats really like is, not gold-fish, but gold itself.

We must return, however, to the dreary days in which Gray divided his leisure from Greek literature between drinking tar-water, on the recommendation of Berkeley's *Siris*, and observing the extraordinary quarrelling and bickering which went on in the combination-room at Pembroke. These dissensions reached a climax in the summer of 1746. The cause of the Master, Dr. Roger Long, was supported by a certain Dr. Andrews, whilst James Brown, popularly styled Obadiah Fusk, led the body of the Fellows, with whom Gray sympathized. "Mr. Brown wants nothing but a foot in height and his own hair to make him a little old Roman," we are told in August of that year, and has been so determined that the Master talks of calling in the Attorney-general to decide. Even in the Long Vacation, Fellows of Pembroke can talk of nothing else, and "tremble while they speak." Tuthill, for some occult reason, is threatened with the loss of his fellowship, and Gray at Stoke, in September, 1746, will hurry to Cambridge at any moment, so as not to be absent during the Pembroke audit.

All this time not one word is said of his own college. Nor was he always so anxious to return to Cambridge. In the winter of 1746 he had a very bright spell of enjoyment in London. "I have been in town," he says to Wharton (December 11th), "flaunting about at public places of all kinds with my two Italianized friends [Chute and Whithead]. The world itself has some attractions in it to a solitary of six years' standing; and agreeable,

well-meaning people of sense (thank Heaven there are so few of them) are my peculiar magnet; it is no wonder, then, if I felt some reluctance at parting with them so soon, or if my spirits, when I return to my cell, should sink for a time, not indeed to storm or tempest, but a good deal below changeable." He was considerably troubled by want of money at this time; he had been to town partly to sell off a little stock to pay an old debt, and had found the rate of exchange so low that he would have lost twelve per cent. He was saved from this necessity by a timely loan from Wharton. He spent his leisure at Christmas in making a great chronological table, the form of which long afterwards suggested to Henry Clinton his *Fasti Hellenici*. Gray's work began with the 30th Olympiad, and was brought down to the 113th, covering, therefore, 332 years. Each page of it was divided into nine columns—one for the Olympiad, the second for the Archons, the third for the public affairs of Greece, the fourth, fifth, and sixth for the Philosophers, the seventh for the Poets, the eighth for the Historians, and the ninth for the Orators.

The same letter which announces this performance mentions the *Odes* of Collins and Joseph Warton. Gray had been briskly supplied with these little books, which had only been published a few days before. The former was the important volume, but the public bought the latter. Gray's comment on Warton and Collins is remarkable: "Each is the half of a considerable man, and one the counterpart of the other. The first has but little invention, very poetical choice of expression, and a good ear. The second, a fine fancy, modelled upon the antique, a bad ear, great variety of words and images, with no choice at all. They both deserve to last some years, *but will not.*"



This last clause is an example of the vanity of prophesying. It is difficult to understand what Gray meant by accusing Collins of a "bad ear," the one thing in which Collins was undoubtedly Gray's superior; in other respects the criticism, though unsympathetic, is not without acumen, and, for bad or good, was the most favourable thing said of Collins for many years to come. In 1748 Gray and Collins were destined to meet, for once during their lives, between the covers of the same book, at which we shall presently arrive.

Gray was thirty years old on the day that he read Collins's *Odes*. He describes himself as "lazy and listless and old and vexed and perplexed," with all human evils but the gout, which was soon to follow. The proceedings at Pembroke had reached such a pass that Gray began to sympathize with the poor old Master, him of the water-velocipede. The Fellows had now grown so rebellious as to abuse him roundly to his face, never to go into combination-room till he went out, or if he entered whilst they were there to continue sitting even in his own magisterial chair. They would bicker with him about twenty paltry matters till he would lose his temper, and tell them they were impertinent. Gray turned from all this to a scheme which he had long had in view, the publication of his friend West's poems. Walpole proposed that he should bring out these and his own odes in a single volume, and Gray was not disinclined to carry out this notion. But when he came to put their "joint-stock" together he found it insufficient in bulk. Nor, as we have already seen, did the few and scattered verses of West see the light till long after the death of Gray. All that came of this talk of printing was the anonymous publication of the *Eton Ode*. Meanwhile, as he says to Wharton, in

March, 1747, "my works are not so considerable as you imagine. I have read Pausanias and Athenæus all through, and Æschylus again. I am now in Pindar and Lysias, for I take verse and prose together like bread and cheese."

About this time the excellent Wharton married and left Cambridge. A still worse misfortune happened to Gray in the destruction of his house in Cornhill, which was burnt down in May, 1748. He seems to have been waked up a little by this disaster, and to have spent seven weeks in town as the guest of various friends, who were "all so sorry for my loss that I could not choose but laugh: one offered me opera tickets, insisted upon carrying me to the grand masquerade, desired me to sit for my picture; others asked me to their concerts, or dinners and suppers at their houses; or hoped I would drink chocolate with them while I stayed in town. All my gratitude—or, if you please, my revenge—was to accept everything they offered me; if it had been but a shilling I should have taken it: thank Heaven, I was in good spirits, else I could not have done it." London was amusing for him at this time, with Horace Walpole flying between Arlington Street and Strawberry Hill, and Chute and his nephew Whithead full of sprightly gaieties and always glad to see him. Whithead, who was in the law, undertook with success about this time some legal business for Gray, the exact nature of which does not appear, and the poet describes him as "a fine young personage in a coat all over spangles, just come over from the tour of Europe to take possession and be married. Say I wish him more spangles, and more estates, and more wives." Poor Whithead did not live long enough to marry one wife; whilst his engagement loitered on he fell ill of a galloping consumption, and died in 1751, his death being accelerated by the

imprudence of his brother, a clergyman, who insisted on taking him out hunting when he ought to have been in bed. Gray's house in Cornhill had been insured for 500*l.*, but the expenses of rebuilding it amounted to 650*l.* One of his aunts, probably Miss Antrobus, made him a present of 100*l.*; another aunt, still more probably Mrs. Oliffe, lent him an equal sum for his immediate wants on a decent rate of interest, and for the remainder he was indebted to the kindness of Wharton. It appears from all this that Gray's income was strictly bounded, at that time, to his actual expenses, and that he had no margin whatever. He declined, in fact, in June, 1748, an invitation from Dr. Wharton to come and stay with him in the North of England, on the ground that "the good people here [at Stoke] would think me the most careless and ruinous of mortals, if I should think of a journey at this time."

In the letter from which a quotation has just been given Gray mentions for the first time a man whose name was to be inseparably associated with his own, without whose pious care for his memory, indeed, the task of writing Gray's life in any detail would be impossible. In the year 1747 Gray's attention was directed by a friend to a modest publication of verses in imitation of Milton; the death of Pope was sung in an elegy called *Musæus*, to resemble *Lycidas*, and Milton's odes found counterparts in *Il Bellicoso* and *Il Pacifico*. These pieces, which were not entirely without a meritorious ease of metre, were the production of William Mason, a young man of twenty-two, the son of a Yorkshire clergyman, and a scholar of St. John's College, Cambridge. His intelligence first attracted the notice of a fellow of his own college, Dr. William Heberden, the distinguished

Professor of Medicine, who was a friend of Gray, and who was very possibly the person who showed Mason's poems to the latter. In the course of the same year (1747), through the exertions of Heberden and Gray, Mason was nominated a Fellow of Pembroke, and proposed to himself to enter that remarkable bear-garden. But Dr. Roger Long refused his consent, and it was not until February, 1749, and after much litigation, that Mason was finally elected.

There was something about Mason which Gray liked, a hearty simplicity and honest ardour that covered a good deal of push which Gray thought vulgar and did not hesitate to chastise. Mason, on his side, was a faithful and affectionate henchman, full of undisguised admiration of Gray and fear of his sarcasm, not unlike Boswell in his persistence, and in his patience in enduring the reproofs of the great man. Gray constantly crushed Mason, but the latter was never offended, and after a few tears returned manfully to the charge. Gray's description of him in the second year of their acquaintance, when Mason was only twenty-three, was this: "Mason has much fancy, little judgment, and a good deal of modesty. I take him for a good and well-meaning creature; but then he is really in simplicity a child, and loves everybody he meets with; he reads little or nothing, writes abundance, and that with a desire to make his fortune by it." This literary fluency was a matter of wonder to Gray, whose own attar of roses was distilled slowly and painfully, drop by drop, and all through life he was apt to overrate Mason's verses. It was very difficult, of course, for him to feel unfavourably towards a friend so enthusiastic and so anxious to please, and we cannot take Gray's earnest approval of Mason's odes and tragedies too critically.

Moreover, he was Gray's earliest and most slavish disciple; before he left St. John's to come within the greater poet's more habitual influence, he had begun to imitate poems which he can only have seen in manuscript.

Henceforward, in spite of his somewhat coarse and superficial nature, in spite of his want of depth in imagination and soundness in scholarship, in spite of a general want of the highest qualities of character, Mason became a great support and comfort to Gray. His physical vigour and versatility, his eagerness in the pursuit of literature, his unselfish ardour and loyalty, were refreshing to the more fastidious and retiring man, who enjoyed, moreover, the chance of having at last found a person with whom he could discourse freely about literature, in that constant easy interchange of impressions which is the luxury of a purely literary life. Moreover, we must do Mason the justice to say that he supplied to Gray's fancy whatever stimulus such a mind as his was calculated to offer, receiving his smallest and most fragmentary effusions with interest, encouraging him to the completion of his poems, and receiving each fresh ode as if a new planet had risen above the horizon. With Walpole to be playful with, and Mason to be serious with, Gray was no longer for the rest of his life exposed to that east wind of solitary wretchedness which had parched him for the first three years of his life at Cambridge. At the same time, grateful as we must be to Mason for his affection and good-heartedness, we cannot refrain from wishing that his poems had been fastened to a mill-stone and cast into the river Cam. They are not only barren and pompous to the very last degree, but to the lovers of Gray they have this disadvantage, that they constantly resolve that poet's true sublime into the ridiculous, and leave on the ear an uncom-

fortable echo, as of a too successful burlesque or parody. Of this Gray himself was not unconscious, though he put the thought behind him, as one inconsistent with friendship.

A disreputable personage who crossed Gray's orbit about this time, and was the object of his cordial dislike and contempt, has left on the mind of posterity a sense of higher natural gifts than any possessed by the respectable Mason. Christopher Smart, long afterwards author of the *Song to David*, was an idle young man who had been admitted to Pembroke in October, 1739, under the protection of the Earl of Darlington, and who in 1745 was elected a Fellow of his college. As early as 1740 he began to be celebrated for the wit and originality of his Latin tripos verse, of which a series are still in existence. One of these, a droll celebration of the Nativity of Yawn, is not unlike Gray's own *Hymn to Ignorance* in its contempt for the genius of Cambridge. But Smart lost credit by his pranks and levities no less quickly than he gained it by his skill. Gray writes in March, 1747, that Smart's debts are increasing daily, and that he drinks hartshorn from morning till night. A month later he has scandalized the University by performing in the Zodiac Room, a club which had been founded in 1725, a play of his own called *A Trip to Cambridge; or, the Grateful Fair*, a piece which was never printed and now no longer is in existence. Already, at this time, Gray thought Smart mad. "He can't hear his own Prologue without being ready to die with laughter. He acts five parts himself, and is only sorry he can't do all the rest. . . . As for his vanity and faculty of lying, they have come to the full maturity. All this, you see, must come to a jail, or Bedlam." It did come to Bedlam, in 1763, but not until Smart had exhausted every eccentricity and painful folly.

possible to man. But the minor catastrophe was much nearer, namely, the jail. In November, 1747, he was arrested at the suit of a London tailor, was got out of prison by means of a subscription made in the college, and received a sound warning to behave better in future, a warning which Gray, who watched him narrowly and noted his moral symptoms with cold severity, justly predicted would be entirely frustrated by his drunkenness.

The frequent disturbances caused in the University by such people as Smart had by this time led to much public scandal. Gray says: "The Fellow-commoners—the bucks—are run mad; they set women upon their heads in the streets at noonday, break open shops, game in the coffee-houses on Sundays, and in short," he adds, in angry irony, "act after my own heart." The Tuns Tavern at Cambridge was the scene of nightly orgies, in which Professors and Fellows set an example of roistering to the youth of the University. Heavy bills were run up at inns and coffee-houses, which were afterwards repudiated with effrontery. The breaking of windows and riots in public parts of the town were indulged in to such an extent as to make Cambridge almost intolerable, and the work of James Brown, Gray's intimate friend, who held the post of Senior Proctor, was far from being a sinecure. In 1748 the Duke of Somerset, who had absolutely neglected his responsibilities, was succeeded in the Chancellorship by the Duke of Newcastle, whose installation promised little hope of reform. Gray described the scene to Wharton: "Every one whilst it lasted was very gay and very busy in the morning, and very owlish and very tipsy at night: I make no exception, from the Chancellor to blue-coat," who was the Vice-chancellor's servant. However, it presently appeared that the Duke of Newcastle was not inclined to

sacrifice discipline. The Bishops united with him in concocting a plan by which the license of the resident members of the University should be checked, and in May, 1750, the famous code of *Orders and Regulations* was brought before the Senate. It was not, however, easy to restore order to a community which had so long been devoted to the Lord of Misrule, and it was not until more than twenty persons of good family had been "expelled or rusticated for very heinous violations of our laws and discipline" that anything like decent behaviour was restored, the fury of the undergraduates displaying itself in a final outburst of mutiny, in which they rushed along the streets brandishing lighted links.

This scene of rebellion and confusion could not fail to excite strong emotion in the mind of a man like Gray, of orderly tastes and timid personal character, to whom a painted Indian would be scarcely a more formidable object than a noisy young buck, flushed with wine, flinging his ash-stick against college windows, and his torch into the faces of passers-by. A life at the University given up to dice and horses, and the loud, coarse Georgian dissipation of that day, could not seem to a thinker to be one which brought glory either to the teacher or the taught, and in the midst of this sensual riot Gray sat down to write his poem on *The Alliance of Education and Government*. Of his philosophical fragments this is by far the best, and it is seriously to be regretted that it does not extend beyond one hundred and ten lines. The design of the poem, which has been preserved, is highly interesting, and the treatment at least as poetical as that of so purely didactic a theme could be. Short as it is, it attracted the warm enthusiasm of Gibbon, who ejaculates: "Instead of compiling tables of chronology and natural history, why did



not Mr. Gray apply the powers of his genius to finish the philosophical poem of which he has left such an exquisite specimen?" The heroic couplet is used with great skill; as an example may be cited the lines describing the invasion of Italy by the Goths—

" As oft have issued, host impelling host,  
The blue-eyed myriads from the Baltic coast;  
The prostrate South to the destroyer yields  
Her boasted titles and her golden fields:  
With grim delight the brood of winter view  
A brighter day, and heavens of azure hue,  
Scent the new fragrance of the breathing rose,  
And quaff the pendant vintage as it grows"—

whilst one line, at least, lives in the memory of every lover of poetry :

" When love could teach a monarch to be wise,  
*And Gospel-light first dawn'd from Bullen's eyes.*"

On the 19th of August, 1748, Gray copied the first fifty-seven lines of this poem in a letter he was writing to Wharton, saying that his object would be to show that education and government must concur in order to produce great and useful men. But as he was pursuing his plan in the leisurely manner habitual to him, Montesquieu's celebrated work, *L'Esprit des Loïs*, was published, and fell into his hands. He found, as he told Mason, that the Baron had forestalled some of his best thoughts, and from this time forth his interest in the scheme languished, and soon after it entirely lapsed. Some years later he thought of taking it up again, and was about to compose a prefatory *Ode to M. de Montesquieu* when that writer died, on the 10th of February, 1755, and the whole thing was abandoned. Gray's remarks on *L'Esprit des*

*Lois* are in his clearest and acutest vein: "The subject is as extensive as mankind; the thoughts perfectly new, generally admirable, as they are just; sometimes a little too refined; in short, there are faults, but such as an ordinary man could never have committed: the style very lively and concise, consequently sometimes obscure—it is the gravity of Tacitus, whom he admires, tempered with the gaiety and fire of a Frenchman." Gray was probably the only Englishman living capable of criticising a new French book with this delicate justice.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE "ELEGY."—SIX POEMS.—DEATHS OF GRAY'S AUNT AND MOTHER.

EARLY in 1748 Dodsley published the first three volumes of his useful miscellany, called *A Collection of Poems*, for the plan of which he claimed an originality that it scarcely deserved, since, like the earlier miscellanies of Gildon and Tonson, it merely aimed at embracing in one work the best scattered poetry of the day. In the second volume were printed, without the author's name, three of Gray's odes—those *To Spring*, *On Mr. Walpole's Cat*, and the *Eton Ode*. Almost all the poets of this age, and several of the preceding, were contributors to the collection. Pope, Green, and Tickell represented the past generation; whilst Collins, Dyer, and Shenstone, in the first volume; Lyttelton, Gilbert West, J. H. Browne, and Edwards, the sonneteer, in the second volume; and Joseph Warton, Garrick, Mason, and Walpole himself, in the third volume, showed to the best of their ability what English poetry in that age was capable of; whilst three sturdy Graces, bare and bold, adorned the title-page of each instalment, and gave a kind of visible pledge that no excess of refinement should mar the singing, even when Lowth, Bishop of London, held the lyre.

As in the crisis of a national history some young man,

unknown before, leaps to the front by sheer force of character, and takes the helm of state before his elders, so in the confusion and mutiny at the University the talents of Dr. Edmund Keene, the new Master of Peterhouse, came suddenly into notice, and from comparative obscurity he rose at once into the fierce light that beats upon a successful reformer. His energy and promptitude pointed him out as a fit man to become Vice-chancellor in the troublous year 1749, although he was only thirty-six years of age, and it was practically owing to his quick eye and hard hand that order was re-instated in the University. With his Mastership of the college Gray began to take an interest for the first time in Peterhouse, and cultivated the acquaintance of Keene, in whom he discovered an energy and practical power which he had never suspected. The reign of Mum Sharp, as the undergraduates nicknamed Keene, was as brief as it was brilliant. In 1752 the Government rewarded his action in the University with the see of Chester, and two years later he resigned his nominal headship of Peterhouse, dying Bishop of Ely nearly thirty years afterwards.

At Pembroke Hall, meanwhile, all was going well at last. In the spring of 1749 there was a pacification between the Master and the Fellows, and Pembroke, says Gray to Wharton, "is all harmonious and delightful." But the rumours of dissension had thinned the ranks of the undergraduates; "they have no boys at all, and unless you can send us a hamper or two out of the North to begin with, they will be like a few rats straggling about a deserted dwelling-house."

Gray was now about to enter the second main period of his literary activity, and he opens it with a hopeless protestation of his apathy and idleness. He writes (April

25, 1749), from Cambridge, this amusing piece of prophecy: "The spirit of laziness, the spirit of this place, begins to possess even me, that have so long declaimed against it. Yet has it not so prevailed but that I feel that discontent with myself, that *ennui* that ever accompanies it in its beginnings. Time will settle my conscience, time will reconcile my languid companion; we shall smoke, we shall tittle, we shall doze together, we shall have our little jokes, like other people, and our long stories. Brandy will finish what port began; and a month after the time you will see in some corner of a *London Evening Post*, 'Yesterday died the Rev. Mr. John Gray, Senior Fellow of Clare Hall, a facetious companion, and well respected by all that knew him. His death is supposed to have been occasioned by a fit of the apoplexy, being found fallen out of bed.'" But this whimsical anticipation of death and a blundering mortuary inscription was startled out of his thoughts by the sudden approach of death itself to one whom he dearly loved. His aunt, Miss Mary Antrobus, died somewhat suddenly, at the age of sixty-six, at Stoke, on the 5th of November, 1749. The letter which Gray wrote to his mother on receiving news of this event is so characteristic of his wise and tender seriousness of character, and allows us to observe so much more closely than usual the real working of his mind, that no apology is needed for quoting it here. It was written from Cambridge, on the 7th of November, 1749:

"The unhappy news I have just received from you equally surprises and afflicts me. I have lost a person I loved very much, and have been used to from my infancy; but am much more concerned for your loss, the circumstances of which I forbear to dwell upon, as you must be too sensible of them yourself; and will, I fear, more and more need a consolation that no one can give, except He who had

preserved her to you so many years, and at last, when it was His pleasure, has taken her from us to Himself; and, perhaps, if we reflect upon what she felt in this life, we may look upon this as an instance of His goodness both to her and to those that loved her. She might have languished many years before our eyes in a continual increase of pain, and totally helpless; she might have long wished to end her misery without being able to attain it; or perhaps even lost all sense and yet continued to breathe; a sad spectacle for such as must have felt more for her than she could have done for herself. However you may deplore your own loss, yet think that she is at last easy and happy, and has now more occasion to pity us than we her. I hope, and beg, you will support yourself with that resignation we owe to Him who gave us our being for good, and who deprives us of it for the same reason. I would have come to you directly, but you do not say whether you desire I should or not; if you do, I beg I may know it, for there is nothing to hinder me, and I am in very good health."

It is impossible to imagine anything more sweet-natured and unaffected than this letter, and it opens to us for a moment the closed and sacred book of Gray's home-life, those quiet autumn days of every year so peacefully spent in loving and being loved by these three placid old ladies at Stoke, in a warm atmosphere of musk and *pot-pourri*.

The death of his aunt seems to have brought to his recollection the *Elegy in a Country Church-yard*, begun seven years before within sight of the ivy-clustered spire under whose shadow she was laid. He seems to have taken it in hand again, at Cambridge, in the winter of 1749, and tradition, which would fain see the poet always writing in the very precincts of a church-yard, has fabled that he wrote some stanzas amongst the tombs of Granchester. He finished it, however, as he began it, at Stoke-Pogis, giving the last touches to it on the 12th of June, 1750. "Having put an end to a thing whose be-

ginning you have seen long ago," he writes on that day to Horace Walpole, "I immediately send it to you. You will, I hope, look upon it in the light of a thing with an end to it: a merit that most of my writings have wanted, and are like to want." Walpole was only too highly delighted with this latest effusion of his friend, in which he was acute enough to discern the elements of a lasting success. It is curious to reflect upon the modest and careless mode in which that poem was first circulated which was destined to enjoy and to retain a higher reputation in literature than any other English poem, perhaps than any other poem of the world, written between Milton and Wordsworth. The fame of the *Elegy* has spread to all countries, and has exercised an influence on all the poetry of Europe, from Denmark to Italy, from France to Russia. With the exception of certain works of Byron and Shakspeare, no English poem has been so widely admired and imitated abroad; and, after more than a century of existence, we find it as fresh as ever, when its copies, even the most popular of all, Lamartine's *Le Lac*, are faded and tarnished. It possesses the charm of incomparable felicity, of a melody that is not too subtle to charm every ear, of a moral persuasiveness that appeals to every generation, and of metrical skill that in each line proclaims the master. The *Elegy* may almost be looked upon as the typical piece of English verse, our poem of poems; not that it is the most brilliant or original or profound lyric in our language, but because it combines in more balanced perfection than any other all the qualities that go to the production of a fine poetical effect. The successive criticisms of a swarm of Dryasdusts, each depositing his drop of siccative, the boundless vogue and consequent profanation of stanza upon stanza,

the changes of fashion, the familiarity that breeds indifference, all these things have not succeeded in destroying the vitality of this humane and stately poem. The solitary writer of authority who since the death of Johnson has ventured to depreciate Gray's poetry, Mr. Swinburne, who, in his ardour to do justice to Collins, has been deep and extravagantly unjust to the greater man, even in coming to curse, has been obliged to bless this "poem of such high perfection and such universal appeal to the tenderest and noblest depths of human feeling," admitting, again, with that frankness which makes Mr. Swinburne the most generous of disputants, that "as an elegiac poet Gray holds for all ages to come his unassailable and sovereign station."

We may well leave to its fate a poem with so splendid a history, a poem more thickly studded with phrases that have become a part and parcel of colloquial speech than any other piece, even of Shakspeare's, consisting of so few consecutive lines. A word or two, however, may not be out of place in regard to its form and the literary history of its composition. The heroic quatrain, in the use of which, here and elsewhere, Gray easily excels all other English writers, was not new to our literature. Among the Pembroke MSS. I find copious notes by Gray on the *Nosce Teipsum* of Sir John Davies, a beautiful philosophical poem first printed in 1599, and composed in the same measure. Davenant had chosen the same for his fragmentary epic of *Gondibert*, and Dryden for his metallic and gorgeous poem of the *Annus Mirabilis*. All these essays were certainly known to Gray, and he was possibly not uninfluenced by the *Love Elegies* of James Hammond, a young cousin of Horace Walpole's, who had died in 1714 and had affected to be the Tibullus of the age. Hammond



had more taste than genius, yet after reading, with much fatigue, his forgotten elegies, I cannot avoid the impression that Gray was influenced by this poetaster, in the matter of form, more than by any other of his contemporaries. A familiar quotation of West—

“Ah me! what boots us all our boasted power,  
Our golden treasure and our purple state?  
They cannot ward the inevitable hour,  
Nor stay the fearful violence of fate”—

was probably the wild-wood stock on which Gray grafted his wonderful rose of roses, borrowing something from all his predecessors, but justifying every act of plagiarism by the brilliance of his new combination. Even the tiresome singsong of Hammond became in Gray's hands an instrument of infinite variety and beauty, as if a craftsman by the mere touch of his fingers should turn ochre into gold. The measure itself, from first to last, is an attempt to render in English the solemn alternation of passion and reserve, the interchange of imploring and desponding tones, that is found in the Latin elegiac, and Gray gave his poem, when he first published it, an outward resemblance to the text of Tibullus by printing it without any stanzaic pauses. It is in this form and with the original spelling that the poem appears in an exquisite little volume, privately printed a few years ago at the Cambridge University Press, in which Mr. Munro has placed his own Ovidian translation of the *Elegy* opposite the original text: as pretty a tribute as was ever paid by one great University scholar to the memory of another.

Walpole's enthusiasm for the *Elegy in a Country Church-yard* led him to commit the grave indiscretion of handing it about from friend to friend, and even of

distributing manuscript copies of it, without Gray's cognizance. At the Manor House at Stoke, Lady Cobham, who seems to have known Horace Walpole, read the *Elegy in a Country Church-yard* in manuscript before it had been many months in existence, and conceived a violent desire to know the author. So quiet was Gray, and so little inclined to assert his own personality, that she was unaware that he and she had lived together in the same country parish for several years, until a Rev. Mr. Robert Pult, a Cambridge Fellow settled at Stoke, told her that "thereabouts there lurked a wicked imp they call a poet." Mr. Pult, however, enjoyed a very slight acquaintance with Gray (he was offended shortly afterwards at the introduction of his name into the *Long Story*, and very properly died of small-pox immediately), and could not venture to introduce him to her ladyship. Lady Cobham, however, had a guest staying with her, a Lady Schaub, who knew a friend of Gray's, a Lady Brown. On this very meagre introduction Lady Schaub and Miss Speed, the niece of Lady Cobham, were persuaded by her ladyship, who shot her arrow like Teucer from behind the shield of Ajax, to call boldly upon Gray. They did so in the summer of 1751, but when they had crossed the fields to West-End House they found that the poet had gone out for a walk. They begged the ladies to say nothing of their visit, but they left amongst the papers in Gray's study this piquant little note: "Lady Schaub's compliments to Mr. Gray; she is sorry not to have found him at home, to tell him that Lady Brown is very well." This little adventure assumed the hues of mystery and romance in so uneventful a life as Gray's, and curiosity combined with good-manners to make him put his shyness in his pocket and return Lady Schaub's polite but eccentric call. That far-reaching spi-

der, the Viscountess Cobham, had now fairly caught him in her web, and for the remaining nine years of her life she and her niece, Miss Speed, were his fast friends. Indeed, his whole life might have been altered if Lady Cobham had had her way, for it seems certain that she would have been highly pleased to have seen him the husband of Harriet Speed and inheritor of the fortunes of the family. At one time Gray seems to have been really frightened lest they should marry him suddenly, against his will; and perhaps he almost wished they would. At all events the only lines of his which can be called amatory were addressed to Miss Speed. She was seven years his junior, and when she was nearly forty she married a very young French officer, and went to live abroad, to which events, not uninteresting to Gray, we shall return in their proper place.

The romantic incidents of the call just described inspired Gray with his fantastic account of them given in the *Long Story*. He dwells on the ancient seat of the Huntingdons and Hattons, from the door of which one morning issued

"A brace of warriors, not in buff,  
But rustling in their silks and tissues.

"The first came cap-à-pee from France,  
Her conquering destiny fulfilling,  
Whom meaner beauties eye askance,  
And vainly ape her art of killing.

"The other Amazon kind Heaven  
Had armed with spirit, wit, and satire;  
But Cobham had the polish given,  
And tipped her arrows with good-nature.

“With bonnet blue and capuchine,  
And aprons long, they hid their armour;  
And veiled their weapons, bright and keen,  
In pity to the country farmer.”

These warriors sallied forth in the cause of a lady of high degree, who had just heard that the parish contained a poet, and who

“Swore by her coronet and ermine  
She’d issue out her high commission  
To rid the manor of such vermin.”

At last they discover his lowly haunt, and bounce in without so much as a tap at the door:

“The trembling family they daunt,  
They flirt, they sing, they laugh, they tattle;  
Rummage his mother, pinch his aunt,  
And up-stairs in a whirlwind rattle:

“Each hole and cupboard they explore,  
Each creek and cranny of his chamber,  
Run hurry-scurry round the floor,  
And o’er the bed and tester clamber:

“Into the drawers and china pry,  
Papers and books, a huge imbroglio;  
Under a teacup he might lie,  
Or creased, like dog’s-ears, in a folio.”

The pitying Muses, however, have conveyed him away, and the proud Amazons are obliged to retreat; but they have the malignity to leave a spell behind them, which their victim finds when he slinks back to his home:

“The words too eager to unriddle  
The poet felt a strange disorder;  
Transparent bird-lime formed the middle,  
And chains invisible the border.

"So cunning was the apparatus,  
The powerful pot-hooks did so move him,  
That, will he nill he, to the great house  
He went as if the devil drove him."

When he arrives at the Manor House, of course, he is dragged before the great lady, and is only saved from destruction by her sudden fit of clemency :

"The ghostly prudes with haggard face  
Already had condemned the sinner.  
My lady rose, and with a grace—  
She smiled, and bid him come to dinner."

All this is excellent fooling, charmingly arch and easy in its humorous romance, and highly interesting as a picture of Gray's home-life. In the Pembroke MS. of the *Long Story* he says that he wrote it in August, 1750. It was included in the semi-private issue of the *Six Poems* in 1753, but in no other collection published during Gray's lifetime. He considered its allusions too personal to be given to the public.

In this one instance Walpole's indiscretion in circulating the *Elegy* brought Gray satisfaction ; in others it annoyed him. On the 10th of February, 1751, he received a rather impertinently civil letter from the publisher of a periodical called the *Magazine of Magazines*, coolly informing him that he was actually printing his "ingenious poem called Reflections in a Country Church-yard," and praying for his indulgence and the honour of his correspondence. Gray immediately wrote to Horace Walpole (February 11): "As I am not at all disposed to be either so indulgent or so correspondent as they desire, I have but one bad way left to escape the honour they would inflict upon me: and therefore am obliged to

desire you would make Dodsley print it immediately (which may be done in less than a week's time) from your copy, but without my name, in what form is most convenient for him, but on his best paper and character; he must correct the press himself, and print it without any interval between the stanzas, because the sense is in some places continued without them." All this was done with extraordinary promptitude, and five days after this letter of Gray's, on the 16th of February, 1751, Dodsley published a large quarto pamphlet, anonymous, price sixpence, entitled *An Elegy wrote in a Country Church-yard*. It was preceded by a short advertisement, unsigned, but written by Horace Walpole. At this point may be inserted a note, which Gray has appended in the margin of the Pembroke MS. of this poem. It settles a point of bibliography which has been discussed by commentator after commentator :

"Published in Febr'y, 1751, by Dodsley, & went thro' four editions, in two months; and afterwards a fifth, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, & 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, & 11<sup>th</sup>, printed also in 1753 with Mr. Bentley's Designs, of w<sup>ch</sup> there is a 2<sup>d</sup> edition, & again by Dodsley in his Miscellany vol. 4<sup>th</sup> & in a Scotch Collection call'd the *Union*; translated into Latin by Chr: Anstey, Esq. and the Rev<sup>d</sup> Mr Roberts, & published in 1762, & again in the same year by Rob: Lloyd, M.A."

Gray here cites fifteen authorised editions of the English text of the *Elegy*; its pirated editions were countless. The *Magazine of Magazines* persisted, although Gray had been neither indulgent nor correspondent, and the poem appeared in the issue for February, published, as was then the habit of periodicals, on the last of that month. The *London Magazine* stole it for its issue for March, and the *Grand Magazine of Magazines* copied it in April. Everybody read it, in town and country;

Shenstone, far away from the world of books, had seen it before the 28th of March. It achieved a complete popular success from the very first, and the name of its author gradually crept into notoriety. The attribution of the *Elegy* to Gray was more general than has been supposed. A pamphlet, printed soon after this date, speaks of "the Maker of the Church-yard Essay" as being a Cambridge celebrity whose claims to preferment had been notoriously overlooked; and by far the cleverest of all the parodies, *An Evening Contemplation*, 1753, a poem of special interest to students of university manners, is preceded by an elaborate compliment to Gray. The success of his poem, however, brought him little direct satisfaction, and no money. He gave the right of publication to Dodsley, as he did in all other instances. He had a Quixotic notion that it was beneath a gentleman to take money for his inventions from a bookseller, a view in which Dodsley warmly coincided; and it was stated by another bookseller, who after Gray's death contended with Mason, that Dodsley was known to have made nearly a thousand pounds by the poetry of Gray. Mason had no such scruples as his friend, and made frantic efforts to regain Gray's copyright, launching vainly into litigation on the subject, and into unseemly controversy.

The autumn of 1750 had been marked in Gray's uneventful annals by the death of Dr. Middleton, and by the visit of a troublesome Indian cousin, Mrs. Forster, who stayed a month in London, and wearied Gray by her insatiable craving after sight-seeing. In Conyers Middleton, who died on the 28th of July, 1750, at the age of sixty-seven, Gray lost one of his most familiar and most intellectual associates, a person of extraordinary talents, to whom, without ever becoming attached, he had become

accustomed. His remark on the event is full of his fine reserve and sobriety of feeling: "You have doubtless heard of the loss I have had in Dr. Middleton, whose house was the only easy place one could find to converse in at Cambridge. For my part, I find a friend so uncommon a thing, that I cannot help regretting even an old acquaintance, which is an indifferent likeness of it; and though I don't approve the spirit of his books, methinks 'tis pity the world should lose so rare a thing as a good writer."

In the same letter he tells Wharton that he himself is neither cheerful nor easy in bodily health, and yet has the mortification to find his spiritual part the most infirm thing about him. He is applying himself heartily to the study of zoology, and has procured for that purpose the works of M. de Buffon. In reply to Wharton's urgent entreaties for a visit he agrees that he "could indeed wish to refresh my *ἐνεργεία* a little at Durham by a sight of you, but when is there a probability of my being so happy?" However, it seems that he would have contrived this expedition, had it not been for the aforesaid cousin, Mrs. Forster, "a person as strange, and as much to seek, as though she had been born in the mud of the Ganges." At the same time he warns Wharton against returning to Cambridge, saying that Mrs. Wharton will find life very dreary in a place where women are so few, and those "squeezy and formal, little skilled in amusing themselves or other people. All I can say is, she must try to make up for it amongst the men, who are not over-agreeable neither."

In spite of this warning the Whartons appear to have come back to Cambridge. At all events, we find Dr. Wharton wavering between that town and Bath as the



best place for him to practise in as a physician, and thereupon there follows a gap of two years in Gray's correspondence with him. The affectionate familiarity of the poet with both Dr. and Mrs. Wharton when they re-emerge in his correspondence, the pet names he has for the children, and the avuncular air of intimacy implied, make it almost certain that in 1751 and 1752 he had the pleasure of seeing these dear friends settled at his side, and enjoyed in their family circle the warmth and brightness of a home. At all events, after the publication of the *Elegy*, Gray is once more lost to us for two years, most unaccountably, since, if the Whartons were close beside him, and Mason across the street at Pembroke, Walpole all this time was exercising his vivacious and importunate pen at Strawberry Hill, and trying to associate Gray in all his schemes and fancies.

One of Walpole's sudden whims was a friendship for that eccentric and dissipated person, Richard Bentley, only son of the famous Master of Trinity, whose acquaintance Walpole made in 1750. This man was an amateur artist of more than usual talent, an elegant scholar in his way, and with certain frivolous gifts of manner that were alternately pleasing and displeasing to Walpole. The artistic merit of Bentley was exaggerated in his own time and has been underrated since, nor does there now exist any important relic of it except his designs for Gray's poems. In the summer of 1752 Horace Walpole seems to have suggested to Dodsley the propriety of publishing an *édition de luxe* of Gray, with Bentley's illustrations; but as early as June, 1751, these illustrations were being made. As Gray gave the poems for nothing, and as Walpole paid Bentley to draw and Müller to engrave the illustrations, it is not surprising that Dodsley was eager to close with

the offer. Bentley threw himself warmly into the project; it is quite certain that he consulted Gray step by step, for the designs show an extraordinary attention to the details and even to the hints of the text. Most probably the three gentlemen amused themselves during the long vacation of 1752 by concocting the whole thing together. Gray, who, it must be remembered, was a connoisseur in painting, was so much impressed by Bentley's talents and versatility, that he addressed to him a copy of beautiful verses, which unfortunately existed only in a single manuscript, and had been torn before Mason found them. In these he says :

"The tardy rhymes that used to linger on,  
To censure cold, and negligent of fame,  
In swifter measures animated run,  
And catch a lustre from his genuine flame.

"Ah ! could they catch his strength, his easy grace,  
His quick creation, his unerring line,  
The energy of Pope they might efface,  
And Dryden's harmony submit to mine.

"But not to one in this benighted age  
Is that diviner inspiration given,  
That burns in Shakspeare's or in Milton's page,  
The pomp and prodigality of heaven.

"As when, conspiring in the diamond's blaze,  
The meaner gems that singly charm the sight  
Together dart their intermingled rays,  
And dazzle with a luxury of light."

This is the Landorian manner of praising, and almost the only instance of a high note of enthusiasm in the entire writings of Gray. Bentley was not ludicrously unworthy of such eulogy; his designs are extremely remark-

able in their way. In an age entirely given up to composed and conventional forms he seems to have drawn from nature and to have studied the figure from life.

Early in March, 1753, the *Poemata-Grayo-Bentleiana*, as Walpole called them, appeared, a small, thin folio, on very thick paper, printed only on one side, and entitled *Designs by Mr. R. Bentley for Six Poems by Mr. T. Gray*. This is the *editio princeps* of Gray's collected poems, and consists of the *Ode to Spring* (here simply called *Ode*), and of the *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat*, of both of which it was the second edition; a third edition of the *Eton Ode*; a first appearance of *A Long Story* and *Hymn to Adversity*; and a twelfth edition of the *Elegy written in a Country Church-yard*. Bentley's illustrations consist of a frontispiece, and a full-page design for each poem, with head-pieces, tail-pieces, and initial letters. The frontispiece is a border of extremely ingenious rococo ornament surrounding a forest glade, in which Gray, a graceful little figure, sits in a pensive attitude. This has a high value for us, since, to any one accustomed to the practice of art, it is obvious that this is a sketch from life, not a composed study, and we have here in all probability a portrait of the poet in his easiest attitude. The figure is that of a young man, of small stature, but elegantly made, with a melancholy and downcast countenance.

The portraiture becomes still more certain when we turn to the indiscreet, but extremely interesting, design for *A Long Story*, where we not only have a likeness of Gray in 1753, which singularly resembles the more elaborate portrait of him painted by Eckhardt in 1747, but we have also Lady Schaub, Mr. Purt, and, what is most interesting of all, the pretty, delicate features of Miss Speed. The Rev. Mr. Purt is represented as blowing the trumpet of

Fame, whilst the Amazon ladies fly through the air, seeking for their victim the poet, who is being concealed by the Muses elsewhere than in a gorge of Parnassus. The designs are engraved on copper by two well-known men of that day. The best are by John Sebastian Müller, some of whose initial letters are simply exquisite in execution; the rest are the work of a man of greater reputation in that day, Charles Grignion, whose work in this instance lacks the refinement of Müller's, which is indeed of a very high order. Grignion was the last survivor amongst persons associated with the early and middle life of Gray; he lived to be nearly a hundred years old, and died as late as 1810. It might be supposed that the merits of the designs to the *Six Poems* lay in the interpretation given by engravers of so much talent to poor drawings, but we happen to possess Gray's implicit statement that this was not the case. If, therefore, we are to consider Bentley responsible, for instance, for such realistic forms as the nude figures in the head-piece to the *Hymn to Adversity*, or for such feeling for foliage as is shown in the head and tail pieces to the first ode, we must claim for him a higher place in English art than has hitherto been conceded to him. At all events the *Six Poems* of 1753 is one of the few really beautiful books produced from an English press during the middle of the eighteenth century, and in spite of its rococo style it is still a desirable possession.

It is pleasant to think of Gray reclining in the blue parlour over the supper-room at Strawberry Hill, turning over prints with Horace Walpole, and glancing down the garden to the Thames that flashed in silver behind the syringas and honeysuckles; or seated, with a little touch of sententious gravity, in the library, chiding Chute and their host for their frivolous taste in heraldry, or incited by

gle for life, expired on the 11th of March, 1753, at the age of sixty-seven. Her son saw her buried, in the family tomb, on the south side of the church-yard, near the church, where may still be read the exquisitely simple and affecting epitaph which he inscribed on her tombstone:

"In the same pious confidence, beside her friend and sister, here sleep the remains of Dorothy Gray, widow, the careful, tender mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her."

When, a few months later, Mason had been standing by the death-bed of his father, and spoke to his friend of the awe that he experienced, Gray's thoughts went back to his mother, and he wrote: "I have seen the scene you describe, and know how dreadful it is: I know too I am the better for it. We are all idle and thoughtless things, and have no sense, no use in the world any longer than that sad impression lasts; the deeper it is engraved the better." These are the words which came into Byron's memory when he received the news of his mother's death.

The Whartons had by this time returned to Durham, and thither at last, in the autumn of 1753, Gray resolved to visit them. He had been unable to remain at Stoke now that it was haunted by the faces of the dead that he had loved, and he went into these lodgings over the hosier's shop in the eastern part of Jermyn Street, which were his favourite haunt in London. He left town for Cambridge in May, and in June wrote to Wharton to say that he was at last going to set out with Stonehewer in a post-chaise for the North. In the middle of July they started, proceeding leisurely by Belvoir, Burleigh, and York, taking a week to reach Studley. The journey was very agreeable, and every place on the route which offered anything curious in architecture, the subject at this moment most in

Rogers bedridden and with Mrs. Oliffe for its other mate. The hospitable Whartons seem again to have taken pity on him, and he went from Jermyn Street up to Tottenham to spend with them Christmas of this same year, 1754.

Walpole remarked that Gray was "in flower" during these years, 1750-'55. It was the blossoming of a species which throws out only one bud each season, and that sometimes nipped by an untimely frost. The rose which Gray's thorn for 1754 was an example of these blighted flowers that never fully expanded. The *Ode on Virtue*, which was found, after the poet's death, in a pocket-book of that year, should have been one of his finest productions, but it is unrevised, and hopelessly truncated. Poor Mason rushed in where a truer poet might have feared to tread, and clipped the straggling lines, and finished it; six complete stanzas, however, are the genuine work of Gray. The verse-form has a catch in the third line, which is, perhaps, the most delicate metrical effect Gray ever attained; whilst some of the nature-poetry in the poem is really exquisite:

"New-born flocks, in rustic dance,  
Frisking ply their feeble feet;  
Forgetful of their wintry trance,  
The birds his presence greet;  
But chief the skylark warbles high  
His trembling, thrilling ecstasy,  
And, lessening from the dazzled sight,  
Melts into air and liquid light."

Here is a stanza which might almost be Wordsworth's

"See the wretch, that long has tost  
On the thorny bed of pain,  
At length repair his vigour lost,  
And breathe and walk again:

The meanest floweret of the vale,  
 The simplest note that swells the gale,  
 The common sun, the air, the skies,  
 To him are opening paradise."

That graceful trifler with metre, the sprightly Gresset, had written an *Épître à ma Sœur* to which Gray frankly avowed that he owed the idea of his poem on Vicissitude. But it was only a few commonplaces which the English poet borrowed from the French one, who might, indeed, remind him that—

" Mille spectacles, qu'autrefois  
 On voyait avec nonchalance,  
 Transportent aujourd'hui, présentant des appas  
 Inconnus à l'indifférence "—

but was quite incapable of Gray's music and contemplative felicities. This *Ode on Vicissitude* seems, in some not very obvious way, to be connected with the death of Pope. It is possible that these were the "few autumn verses" which Gray began to write on that occasion. His manner of composition, his slow, half-hearted, desultory touch, his whimsical fits of passing inspiration, are unique in their kind; there never was a professional poet whose mode was so thoroughly that of the amateur.

A short prose treatise, first printed in 1814, and named by the absurd Mathias *Architectura Gothica*, although the subject of it is purely Norman architecture, seems to belong to this year, 1754. Gray was the first man in England to understand architecture scientifically, and his taste was simply too pure to be comprehended in an age that took William Kent for its architectural prophet. Even amongst those persons of refined feeling who desired to cultivate a taste for old English buildings there was a sad absence of exact knowledge. Akenside thought that the

ruins of Persepolis formed a beautiful example of the Gothic style; and we know that Horace Walpole dazzled his contemporaries with the gimerack pinnacles of Strawberry Hill. We may see from Bentley's frontispiece to the *Elegy*, where a stucco moulding is half torn away, and reveals a pointed arch of brick-work, that even among the elect the true principles of Gothic architecture were scarcely understood. What Georgian amateurs really admired was a grotto with cockle-shells and looking-glasses such as the Greatheads made at Guy's Cliff, or such foliage in foliage as Shenstone perpetrated at Leasowes. Gray strove hard to clear his memory of all such trifling, and to arm his reason against arguments such as those of Pucke, who held that the Gothic arch was a degradation of the Moorish cupola, or of Batty Langley, who invented five orders in a new style of his own. Gray's treatise on Norman architecture is so sound and learned that it is much to be regretted that he has not left us more of his architectural essays. He formed his opinions from personal observation and measurement. Amongst the Pembroke MSS. there are copious notes of a tour in the Fenland during which he jotted down the characteristics of all the principal minsters, as far as Crowland and Boston. It is not too much to say that Gray was the first modern student of the history of architecture. Norton Nichols has recorded that when certain would-be people of taste were wrangling about the style in which some ancient building was constructed, Gray cut the discussion short by saying in the spirit of Mr. Ruskin, "Call it what you please, but allow that it is beautiful." He did not approve of Walpole's Gothic constructions at Strawberry Hill, and frankly told him, when he was shown the gilding and the glass that he had "degenerated into finery."



readers captive by their appeal to a common humanity. He was now about to launch upon a manner of writing which he could no longer be accompanied by the plauds of the vulgar, and where his style could no longer appeal with security to the sympathy of the critics. He was now, in other words, about to put out his most original quality in poetry.

That he could not hope for popularity he was aware from the outset: "Be assured," he consoled his friends, "that my taste for praise is not like that of children for fruit; if there were nothing but medlars and blackberries in the world, I could be very well content to go without any of them all." He could wait patiently for the suffrage of his peers. The very construction of the poem was a puzzle to his friends, although it is one of the most intelligibly and rationally built of all the odes in the language. It is, in point of fact, a poem of three stanzas, in an elaborate and consistent verse-form, with forty-one lines in each stanza. The length of these periods is relieved by the regular division of each stanza into strophe, antistrophe, and epode, the same plan having been used by no previous English poet but Congreve, who had written in 1705 a learned and graceful *Discourse on the Pindarique Ode*, which Gray was possibly acquainted with. Congreve's practice, however, had been as unsatisfactory as his theory was excellent, and Gray was properly the first poet to comprehend and follow the mode of Pindar.

Mr. Matthew Arnold has pointed out that the evolution of *The Progress of Poesy* is no less noble and sound than its style. It is worthy of remark that the power of evolution has not been common amongst lyrical poets even of high rank. Even in Milton it is strangely absent, and we feel that all his odes, beautiful as they are, do not bud a

branch and fall in fruit, closing with the exhaustion of their functions, but merely cease, because all poems must stop somewhere. The *Nativity Ode* does not close because the poet has nothing more to say, but merely because "'tis time our tedious song should here have ending." In Collins, surely, we find the same failing; the poem is a burst of emotion, but not an organism. The much-lauded *Ode to Liberty*, with its opening peal of trumpet-music, ends with a foolish abruptness, as if the poet had got tired of his instrument and had thrown it away. Shelley, again, in his longer odes, seems to lose himself in beautiful, meandering oratory, and to stop, as he began, in response to a mere change of purpose. Keats, on the other hand, is always consistent in his evolution, and so is Wordsworth at his more elevated moments; the same may even be remarked of a poet infinitely below these in intellectual value, Edgar Poe. Gray, however, is the main example in our literature of a poet possessing this Greek quality of structure in his lyrical work, and it is to be noted that throughout his career it never left him, even on occasions when he was deserted by every other form of inspiration. His poems, whatever they are, are never chains of consecutive stanzas; each line, each group of lines, has its proper place in a structure that could not be shorter or longer without a radical re-arrangement of ideas.

The strophe of the opening stanza of *The Progress of Poesy* invokes that lyre of Æolian strings, the breathings of those Æolian flutes, which Pindar had made the symbol of the art of poetry, and the sources, progress, and various motion of that art, "enriching every subject with a pomp of diction and luxuriant harmony of numbers," are described under the image of a thousand descending streams. The antistrophe returns to the consideration of the power

of poetry, not now in motion, but an alluring and soothing force around which the Passions throng and are subdued, a thought being here borrowed apparently from Collins; the epode continues and combines these strains of thought, and shows that poetry, whether in motion or at rest, is working the good-will of Love, and designs herself to move in a rhythmic harmony and be slave of verse. In the second stanza the strophe recalls the miserable state of man, relieved by the amenities of the heavenly Muse, who arms Hyperion against the sickly company of Night; the antistrophe shows us how the need of song arose in savage man, and illuminated "their feathered chiefs and dusky loves" whilst the epode breaks into an ecstatic celebration of the advent of poetic art in Greece:

"Woods, that wave o'er Delphi's steep,  
Isles, that crown th' Ægean deep,  
Fields, that cool Ilissus laves,  
Or where Meander's amber waves  
In lingering labyrinth creep,  
How do your tuneful echoes languish,  
Mute but to the voice of anguish!  
Where each old poetic mountain  
Inspiration breathed around;  
Every shade and hallowed fountain  
Murmured deep a solemn sound."

But the Muses, "in Greece's evil hour," went to Rome and "when Latium had her lofty spirit lost," it was Albion that they turned their steps. The third strophe describes how the awful mother unveiled her face to Shakespeare; the antistrophe celebrates the advent of Milton and Dryden, whilst the final epode winds the whole poem to a close with a regret that the lyre once held by the famous named poet has degenerated into hands like Gray's:

“Hark! his hands the lyre explore!  
Bright-eyed Fancy, hovering o’er,  
Scatters from her pictured urn  
Thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.  
But ah! ’tis heard no more—  
Oh! lyre divine, what daring spirit  
Wakes thee now? Though he inherit  
Not the pride, nor ample pinion,  
That the Theban eagle bear,  
Sailing with supreme dominion  
Thro’ the azure deep of air:  
Yet oft before his infant eyes would run  
Such forms as glitter in the Muse’s ray,  
With orient hues, unborrowed of the sun:  
Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way  
Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,  
Beneath the Good how far!—but far above the Great.”

In these passages, especially where he employs the double rhyme, we seem to catch in Gray the true modern accent, the precursor of the tones of Shelley and Byron, both of whom, but especially the former, were greatly influenced by this free and ringing music. The reader has only to compare the epode last quoted with the choruses in *Hellas* to see what Shelley owed to the science and invention of Gray. This manner of rhyming, this rapid and recurrent beat of song, was the germ out of which have sprung all later metrical inventions, and without which Mr. Swinburne himself might now be polishing the heroic couplet to its last perfection of brightness and sharpness.

Another Pindaric ode on *The Liberty of Genius* was planned about the same time, but of this there exists only the following fragment of an argument: “All that men of power can do for men of genius is to leave them at their liberty, compared to birds that, when confined to a cage, do but regret the loss of their freedom in melancholy

strains, and lose the luscious wildness and happy luxuriance of their notes, which used to make the woods resound. The subject is one well fitted to its author's power, and we regret its loss as we regret that of Collins's *Ode on the Music of the Grecian Theatre*. Unlike that blue rose of the bibliophiles, however, Gray's ode probably was never written at all.

In the meantime not much was happening to Gray himself. His friend Mason had taken holy orders, and in November, 1754, had become rector of Ashton and chaplain to the Earl of Holderness. "We all are mighty glad," says Gray, "that he is in orders, and no better than any of us." Early in 1755 both Mason and Walpole set upon Gray to publish a new volume of poems, whereupon he held up the single ode *On the Progress of Poesy*, and asked if they wished him to publish a "little sixpenny flambeau like that, all by itself. He threatened if Wharton be tired of some, since the publishing faction had gained him over to their side, to write an ode against physicians, with some very stringent lines about magnesia and alicant soap. Pembroke meanwhile had just received an undergraduate of quality, Lord Strathmore, Thane of Glamis, "a tall genteel figure," that pleased Gray, and presently was admitted within the narrow circle of his friends.

According to Mason, the exordium of *The Bard* was completed in March, 1755, having occupied Gray for about three months. In the case of this very elaborate poem Gray seems to have laid aside his customary reticence, and to have freely consulted his friends. Mason had seen the beginning of it before he went to Germany in May of that year, when he found in Hamburg a literary lady who had read the "*Nitt Toats*" of Young, and thought the *Elegy in a Country Church-yard* "bien jolie et mélancholique."

Mason at Hanover meets Lord Nuneham, and is sure that Gray would delight in him, because he is so peevish and sensible and so good a hater, which gives us a passing glance at Gray himself. *The Bard* was exactly two years and five months in reaching completion, and the slowness of its growth was the subject of mirth with Gray himself, who called it "Odikle," and made fun of its stunted proportions.

On the 15th of July, 1755, Gray went down to the Vine, in Hampshire, to visit his old friend Chute, who was now beginning to recover a little from the shock of the death of his beloved heir and nephew. In the congenial company of the Italianate country gentleman Gray stayed a few days, and then went on to Southampton, Winchester, Portsmouth, and Netley Abbey, returning to Stoke on the 31st of July. Unfortunately, he either took a chill on this little tour or overtaxed his powers, and from this time to the end of his life, a period of sixteen years, he was seldom in a condition of even tolerable health. In August he was obliged to put himself under medical treatment; one alarming attack of gout after the other continued to undermine his constitution, and his system was further depressed by an exhausting regimen of magnesia and salts of wormwood. He had to lie up at Stoke for many weeks, with aching feet and temples, and was bled until he was too giddy and feeble to walk with comfort. All this autumn and winter of 1755 his symptoms were very serious. He could not sleep; he was troubled by a nervous deafness, and a pain in the region of the heart which seldom left him. Meanwhile, he did not leave *The Bard* untouched, but progressed slowly with it, as though he were a sculptor, deliberately pointing and chiselling a statue. He adopted the plan of copying stro-

phes and fragments of it in his letters, and many such scraps exist in MS. Late in the autumn, however, he thought that he was falling into a decline, and in a fit of melancholy he laid *The Bard* aside.

Gray was altogether in a very nervous, distracted condition at this time, and first began to show symptoms of that fear of fire which afterwards became almost a mania with him, by desiring Wharton to insure the two houses, at Wanstead and in Cornhill, which formed a principal part of his income. From the amount of the policies of these houses, we can infer that the first was a property of considerable value. The death of his mother, following on that of Miss Antrobus, had, it may here be remarked, removed all pressure of poverty from Gray for the remainder of his life. He was never rich, but from this time forward he was very comfortably provided for. Horace Walpole appears to have been alarmed at his friend's condition of health, and planned a change of scene for him, which it seems unfortunate that he could not persuade himself to undertake. George Hervey, Earl of Bristol, was named English Minister at Lisbon, and he offered to take Gray with him as his secretary, but the proud little poet refused. Perhaps the climate of Portugal might have proved too relaxing for him, and he might have laid his bones beside that grave where the grass was hardly green yet over the body of Fielding.

Gray's terror of fire has already been alluded to, and it had now become so marked as to be a subject of conversation in the college. He professed rather openly to believe that some drunken fellow or other would burn the college down about their heads. On the 9th of January, 1756, he asked Dr. Wharton to buy him a rope-ladder of a man in Wapping who advertised such articles. It was

to be rather more than thirty-six feet long, with strong hooks at the top. This machine Wharton promptly forwarded, and Gray proceeded to have an iron bar fixed within his bedroom-window. This bar, crossing a window which looks towards Pembroke, still exists and marks Gray's chambers at Peterhouse. Such preparations, however, could not be made without attracting great attention in the latter college, where Gray was by no means a favourite amongst the high-coloured young gentlemen who went bull-baiting to Heddington, or came home drunk and roaring from a cock-shying at Market Hill. Accordingly, the noisy fellow-commoners determined to have a lark at the timid little poet's expense, and one night in February, 1756, when Gray was asleep in bed, they suddenly alarmed him with a cry of fire on his staircase, having previously placed a tub of water under his window. The *ruse* succeeded only too well: Gray, without staying to put on his clothes, hooked his rope-ladder to the iron bar, and descended nimbly into the tub of water, from which he was rescued, with shouts of laughter, by the unmannerly youths. But the jest might easily have proved fatal; as it was, he shivered in the February air so excessively that he had to be wrapped in the coat of a passing watchman, and to be carried into the college by the friendly Stonehewer, who now appeared on the scene. To our modern ideas this outrage on a harmless middle-age man of honourable position, who had done nothing whatever to provoke insult or injury, is almost inconceivable. But there was a deep capacity for brutal folly underneath the varnish of the eighteenth century, and no one seems to have sympathized with Gray, or to have thought the conduct of the youths ungentlemanly. As, when Dryden was beaten by Rochester's hired and masked bravos, it was



felt that Dryden was thereby disgraced, so Gray's friends were consistently silent on this story, as though it were a shame to him, and we owe our knowledge of the particulars to strangers, more especially to a wild creature called Archibald Campbell, who actually ventured to tell the tale during Gray's lifetime.

Gray was very angry, and called upon the authorities of his college to punish the offenders. Mason says: "After having borne the insults of two or three young men of fortune longer than might reasonably have been expected from a man of less warmth of temper, Mr. Gray complained to the governing part of the Society; and not thinking that his remonstrance was sufficiently attended to, quitted the college." He went over to his old friends at Pembroke,<sup>1</sup> who welcomed him with one accord as if he had been "Mary of Valens in person." Under the foundation of this sainted lady he remained for the rest of his life, comfortably lodged, surrounded by congenial friends, and "as quiet as in the Grande Chartreuse." He does not seem to have ever been appointed to a fellowship at Pembroke. The chambers he is supposed to have occupied are still shown—a large, low room, at the western end of the Hitcham Building, bright and pleasant, with windows looking east and west. He adopted habits at Pembroke which he had never indulged in at Peterhouse. He was the first, and for a long while the only, person in the University who made his rooms look pretty. He took care that his windows should be always full of mignonette or some other sweetly-scented plant, and he was famous for a pair of huge Japanese vases, in blue and white china. His servant, Stephen Hempstead, had to keep the room

<sup>1</sup> In the Admission Book at Pembroke there is this entry: "Thomas Gray, LL.B., admissus est ex Collegio Divi Petro. March (*sic*) 6, 1756."

as bright and spick as an old lady's bandbox, and not an atom of dust was allowed to rest on the little harpsichord where the poet used to sit in the twilight and play toccatas of Searlatti or Pergolesi. Here for fifteen quiet years, the autumn of his life, Gray lived amongst his books, his china, and his pictures, and here at last we shall see him die, with the good Master of Pembroke, *le Petit Bon Homme*, holding his hand in the last services of friendship. Well might Gray write to Wharton (March 25, 1756): "Removing myself from Peterhouse to Pembroke may be looked upon as a sort of æra in a life so barren of events as mine."

Curiously enough, the shock and agitation of the scene that has been just described appear to have had no ill effect upon Gray's health. His letters at this time became, on the contrary, much more buoyant in tone. In April, 1756, an extraordinary concert of spiritual music, in which the *Stabat Mater* of Pergolesi was for the first time given in England, drew him up to London for three days, during which time he lodged with Wharton. All the ensuing summer Mason, now and henceforth known as "Scrod-dles" in Gray's correspondence, was perpetrating reams of poetry, or prose astonished out of its better nature at the sudden invasion of its provinces by rhyme. A terrible tragedy of *Caractacus*, suggested by the yet unfinished *Bard*, with much blank-verse invocation of "Arviragus, my bold, my breathless boy," belongs to this year 1756, and can now be read only by a very patient student bent on finding how nimble Mason could be in borrowing the mere shell and outward echo of Gray's poetical performances. The famous

"While through the west, where sinks the crimson day,  
Meek twilight slowly sails, and waves her banners gray,"

which Gray pronounced "superlative," and which the modern reader must admit to be pretty, belong also to this year, and are to be found in an ode of Mason's, *To a Friend*, in which occurs the first contemporary celebration of a greater name in literature than his:

"Through this still valley let me stray,  
Rapt in some strain of pensive GRAY,  
Whose lofty genius bears along  
The conscious dignity of song;  
And, scorning from the sacred store  
To waste a note on pride or power,  
Roves through the glimmering twilight gloom,  
*And warbles round each rustic tomb;*  
He, too, perchance (for well I know  
His heart can melt with friendly woe)—  
He, too, perchance, when these poor limbs are laid,  
Will heave one tuneful sigh, and soothe my hovering shade."

Gray must have smiled at this foolish tribute, but he valued the affection that prompted it, and he deigned a fatherly way to beg Wharton to let him hear if the odes were favourably spoken of in London.

The scene of Mason's *Caractacus* was laid in Mona, and Gray was at this time engaged in the spiritual ascension of Snowdon, with "Odikle" at his side: "I hope we shall be very good neighbours. Any Druidical anecdotes that I can meet with I will be sure to send you. I am of opinion that the ghosts"—for, alas! there are ghosts in *Caractacus*—"will spoil the picture, unless they are thrown at a huge distance, and extremely kept down." In June, 1756, having "no more pores and muscular inflations, and troubled only with depression of mind," Gray at Stoke rather vaguely proposed to Mason at Tunbridge that they should spend the summer together on the Co-

tinent. "Shall we go in time, and have a house together in Switzerland? It is a fine poetical country to look at, and nobody there will understand a word we say or write." Mason was probably too much a child of his age to relish going to Switzerland; moreover, there was a chaplaincy to Lord John Cavendish towards which Mason was extending a greedy finger and thumb, and he preferred to remain in the happy hunting-grounds of endowment. Gray laughed with indulgent contempt at his young friend's grasping wishes, though when this intense desire for place passed all decent limits he could reprove it sharply enough. To the sober and self-respecting Gray, who had never asked for anything in his life, to intrigue for Church preferment was the conduct of a child or a knave, and he accordingly persisted in treating Mason as a child.

Very little progress was made with *The Bard* in 1756. In December of that year "Odikle is not a bit grown, though it is fine mild open weather." Suddenly, in May, 1757, it was brought to a conclusion in consequence of some concerts given at Cambridge by John Parry, the famous blind harper, who lived until 1782, and whose son was one of the first A.R.A.'s. Gray's account of the extraordinary effect that this man's music made on him is expressed in that light vein with which he loved to conceal deep emotion: "There is no faith in man, no, not in a Welshman; and yet Mr. Parry has been here, and scratched out such ravishing blind harmony, such tunes of a thousand years old, with names enough to choke you, as have set all this learned body a-dancing, and inspired them with due reverence for my old Bard his countryman, wherever he shall appear. Mr. Parry, you must know, has put my ode in motion again, and has brought it at last to a conclusion. 'Tis to him, therefore, that you owe the

treat which I send you enclosed; namely, the breast and merry-thought, and rump too, of the chicken which I have been chewing so long that I would give it to the world for neck-beef or cow-heel."

The ode so rudely spoken of is no less than that *Bard* which for at least a century remained almost without a rival amongst poems cherished by strictly poetical persons for the qualities of sublimity and pomp of vision. It is only in the very latest generation, and amongst a school of extremely refined critics, that the ascendancy of this ode has been questioned, and certain pieces by Collins and even by Blake preferred to it. There is a great and even a legitimate pleasure in praising that which plainly possesses very high merit, and which has too long been overlooked or neglected; but we must beware of the paradox which denies beauty in a work of art, *because* beauty has always been discovered there. Gray's *Bard* has enjoyed an instant and sustained popularity, whilst Collins's noble *Ode to Liberty* has had few admirers, and Blake's *Book of Thel* till lately has had none; but there is no just reason why a wish to assert the value of the patriotic fervour of the one poem and the rosy effusion of the other should prevent us from acknowledging that, great as are the qualities of these pieces, the human sympathy, historical imagination, and sustained dithyrambic dignity of *The Bard* are also great, and probably greater. All that has been said of the evolution of the *Progress of Poesy* is true of that of *The Bard*, whilst those attributes which our old critics used to term "the machinery" are even more brilliant and appropriate in the longer poem than in the shorter. In form the poems are sufficiently analogous; each has three main divisions, with strophe, antistrophe, and epode, and in each the epode is dedicated to briskly rhyming

measures and experiments in metre. The opening is admirably startling and effective; the voice that meets us with its denunciations is that of the last survivor of the ancient race of Celtic bards, a venerable shape who is seated on a rock above the defile through which the forces of Edward I. are about to march. This mysterious being, in Gray's own words, "with a voice more than human, reproaches the King with all the misery and desolation which he had brought on his country; foretells the misfortunes of the Norman race; and with prophetic spirit declares that all his cruelty shall never extinguish the noble ardour of poetic genius in this island, and that men shall never be wanting to celebrate true virtue and valour in immortal strains, to expose vice and infamous pleasure, and boldly censure tyranny and oppression." The scheme of the poem, therefore, is strictly historical, and yet is not very far removed from that of Gray's previous written and unwritten Pindaric odes. In these three poems the dignity of genius and its function as a ruler and benefactor of mankind are made the chief subject of discourse, and a mission is claimed for artists in verse than which none was ever conceived more brilliant or more august. But, fortunately for his readers, Gray was diverted from his purely abstract consideration of history into a concrete observation of its most picturesque forms, and forgot to trace the "noble ardour of poetic genius" in painting vivid pictures of Edward II. enduring his torture in Berkeley Castle, and of the massacre of the Bards at the battle of Camlan. Some of the scenes which pass across the magic mirror of the old man's imagination are unrivalled for concision and force. That in which the court of Elizabeth, surrounded by her lords and her poets, flashes upon the inner eye, is of an inimitable felicity :

"Girt with many a baron bold,  
 Sublime their starry fronts they rear;  
 And gorgeous dames, and statesmen old  
 In bearded majesty, appear.  
 In the midst a form divine!  
 Her eye proclaims her of the Briton line;  
 Her lion port, her awe-commanding face,  
 Attenuated sweet to virgin grace.  
 What strings symphonious tremble in the air,  
 What strains of vocal transport round her pass;  
 Hear from the grave, great Taliessin, hear;  
 They breathe a soul to animate thy clay.  
 Bright Rapture calls, and, soaring as she sings,  
 Waves in the eye of Heaven her many-coloured wings.

This closing vision of a pretty but incongruous picture may remind us that the crowning fault of his school, their assumption that a mythology formed out of the emotions of the human mind, new Olympus be fitted out with brand-new gods, a poet's making, is rarely prominent in *The Bard*. Some use of allegorical abstraction is necessary to the structure of poetry, and is to be found in the work of most realistic writers. It is in its excess that it is ridiculous or tedious, as in Mason and other imitators of Gray. The master himself was not by any means all times to clothe his abstractions with flesh and blood, but he is never ridiculous. He felt, indeed, the force of the tendency in himself and others, and he made some remarks on the subject to Mason which were worthy:

"I had rather some of these personages, 'Resignation,' 'Revenge,' 'Slaughter,' 'Ambition,' were stripped of their garb. A little simplicity here and there in the expres-

better prepare the high and fantastic strain, and all the imaginable harpings that follow. . . . The true lyric style, with all its flights of fancy, ornaments, and heightening of expression, and harmony of sound, is in its nature superior to every other style; which is just the cause why it could not be borne in a work of great length, no more than the eye could bear to see all this scene that we constantly gaze upon—the verdure of the fields and woods, the azure of the sea and skies—turned into one dazzling expanse of gems. The epic, therefore, assumed a style of graver colours, and only stuck on a diamond (borrowed from her sister) here and there, where it best became her. When we pass from the diction that suits this kind of writing to that which belongs to the former, it appears natural, and delights us; but to pass on a sudden from the lyric glare to the epic solemnity (if I may be allowed to talk nonsense) has a very different effect. We seem to drop from verse into mere prose, from light into darkness. Do you not think if Mingotti stopped in the middle of her best air, and only repeated the remaining verses (though the best Metastasio ever wrote), that they would not appear very cold to you, and very heavy?"

Between Dryden and Wordsworth there was no man but Gray who could write in prose about his art with such coherence and science as this. These careless sentences outweigh tomes of Blair's glittering rhetoric and Hurd's stilted disquisitions on the Beautiful and the Elevated.

Almost directly after Gray had finished *The Bard* he was called upon to write an epitaph for a lady, Mrs. Jane Clarke, who had died in childbirth at Epsom, where her husband was a physician, on the 27th of April, 1757. Dr. Clarke had been an early college friend of Gray's, and he applied to Gray to write a copy of verses to be inscribed on a tablet in Beckenham church, where his wife was buried. Gray wrote sixteen lines, not in his happiest vein, and these found their way into print after his death. In his tiny nosegay there is, perhaps, no flower so incon-



siderable as this perfunctory *Epitaph*. One letter, several years later than the date of this poem, proves that Gray continued to write on intimate terms to Dr. Clark, who does not seem to have preserved the poet's correspondence, and is not otherwise interesting to us. In April Gray made another acquaintance, of a very different kind. Lord Nuncham, a young man of fashion and fortune, with a rage for poetry, came rushing down upon him with a letter of introduction and a profusion of compliments. He brought a large bouquet of jonquils, which he presented to the poet with a reverence so profound that Gray could not fail to smell the jessamine-powder in his periwig, and indeed he was too fine "even for me," says the poet, "who love a little finery." Lord Nuncham came expressly, in Newmarket week, to protest against going to Newmarket, and sat devoutly at Gray's feet, half enthusiast, for three whole days, talking about verses and the fine arts. Gray was quite pleased with him at last, and so "we vowed eternal friendship, embraced, and parted." Lord John Cavendish, too, was in Cambridge at this time, and also pleased Gray, though in a very different and less effusive manner.

In the summer of 1757 Horace Walpole set up a printing-press at Strawberry Hill, and persuaded Gray to let his Pindaric Odes be the first issue of the establishment. Accordingly Gray sent him a MS. copy of the poems, and they were set up with wonderful fuss and circumstance by Walpole's compositor; Gray being more than usually often at Strawberry Hill this summer. Dodsley agreed to publish the book, and 2000 copies were struck off. On the 29th of June Gray received forty guineas, the only money he ever gained by literature. On the 8th of August there was published a large, thin quarto, entitled

Nuneham, for all his jonquils and his jessamine-powder did not trouble himself to acknowledge his presentation copy; people said Gray's style was "impenetrable and inexplicable" and altogether the sweets were fewer than the bitters in the cup of notoriety.

Gray had placed himself, however, at one leap at the head of the living English poets. Thomson and Blair were now dead, Dyer was about to pass away, and Collins, hopelessly insane, was making the cloisters of Chichester resound with his terrible shrieks. Young, now very aged, had almost abandoned verse. Johnson had retired from all competition with the poets. Smart, whose frivolous verses had been collected in 1754, had shown himself, in his few serious efforts, a direct disciple and imitator of Gray's early style. Goldsmith, Churchill, and Cowper were still unheard of; and the only men with whom Gray could for a moment be supposed to contend were Shenstone and Akenside. Practically both of these men also, had retired from poetry, the latter, indeed, having been silent for twelve years. The *Odes* could hardly fail to attract attention in a year which produced no other even noticeable publication in verse, except Dyer's tiresome descriptive poem of *The Fleece*. Gray seems to have felt that his genius, his "verve," as he called it, was trying to breathe in a vacuum; and from this time forward he made even less and less effort to concentrate his power. In the winter of 1757, it is true, he began to plan an epic or didactic poem on the Revival of Learning, but we hear no more of it. His few remaining poems were to be lyrics, pure and simple, swallow-flights of song.

On the 12th of December, 1757, Colley Cibber died, having held the office of poet-laureate for twenty-seven years. Lord John Cavendish immediately suggested t

his brother, the Duke of Devonshire, who was then Lord Chamberlain, that, as Gray was the greatest living poet, the post should be offered to him. This was immediately done, in very handsome terms, the duke even offering to waive entirely the perfunctory writing of odes, which had hitherto been deemed an annual duty of all poets-laureate. Gray directed Mason, through whom the offer had been made, to decline it very civilly :

“Though I well know the bland, emollient, saponaceous qualities both of sack and silver, yet if any great man would say to me, ‘I make you rat-catcher to his Majesty, with a salary of 300*l.* a year and two butts of the best Malaga; and though it has been usual to catch a mouse or two, for form’s sake, in public once a year, yet to you, sir, we shall not stand upon these things,’ I cannot say I should jump at it; nay, if they would drop the very name of the office, and call me sinecure to the King’s Majesty, I should still feel a little awkward, and think everybody I saw smelt a rat about me; but I do not pretend to blame any one else that has not the same sensations; for my part, I would rather be serjeant-trumpeter or pin-maker to the palace. Nevertheless, I interest myself a little in the history of it, and rather wish somebody may accept it that will retrieve the credit of the thing, if it be retrievable, or ever had any credit. Rowe was, I think, the last man of character that had it. As to Settle, whom you mention, he belonged to my Lord Mayor, not to the King. Eusden was a person of great hopes in his youth, though at last he turned out a drunken parson. Dryden was as disgraceful to the office, from his character, as the poorest scribbler could have been from his verses. The office itself has always humbled the professor hitherto (even in an age when kings were somebody), if he were a poor writer, by making him more conspicuous, and if he were a good one by setting him at war with the little fry of his own profession, for there are poets little enough to envy even a poet-laureate.”

The duke acted promptly, for within a week of Cibber’s death the laureateship had been offered to Gray, who refused, and to Whitehead, who accepted it. This amiable

versifier was, perhaps, more worthy of the compliment than Mason, who wished for it, and who raged with disappointment.

In January, 1758, Gray seems to have recovered sufficiently to be so busy buying South Sea annuities, and amassing old china jars and three-legged stools with green bottoms, that he could not supply Mason with the endless flood of comment on Mason's odes, tragedies, and epics which the vivacious poetaster demanded. Hurd took the gentlemanly manner to which Mr. Leslie Stephen dedicated one stringent page, was calling upon Gray to sympathise with him about the wickedness of "the wretch" Akenside. In all this Gray had but slight interest. His father's fortune, which had reached 10,000*l.* in his mother's careful hands, had been much damaged by the fire in Cornhill, and Gray now sank a large portion of his property in an annuity, that he might enjoy a large income. During the spring of 1758 he amused himself by writing in the blank leaves of Kitchen's English Antiquities, *A Catalogue of the Antiquities, Houses, etc., in England and Wales*. This was considerable enough to form a little volume, and in 1774, after Gray's death, Mason printed a few copies of it privately, and sent them round to Gray's friends; and in 1787 issued a second edition for sale.

In April of the same year, 1758, Dr. Wharton lost his eldest and, at that time, his only son. Gray not only wrote him a very touching letter of condolence, but some verses on the death of the child, which were in existence thirty years ago, but which I have been unable to trace. May Gray started on that architectural tour in the February of which I have already spoken, and in June was summoned to Stoke by the illness of his aunt, Mrs. Oliffe, who had a sort of paralytic stroke whilst walking in the garden.

She recovered, however, and Gray returned to London, made a short stay at Hampton with Lord and Lady Cobham, and spent July at Strawberry Hill. In August the Garricks again visited him at Stoke, but he had hardly enough physical strength to endure their vivacity. "They are now gone, and I am not sorry for it, for I grow so old that, I own, people in high spirits and gaiety overpower me, and entirely take away mine. I can yet be diverted by their sallies, but if they appear to take notice of my dullness, it sinks me to nothing. . . . I continue better than has been usual with me in the summer, though I neither walk nor take anything: 'tis in mind only that I am weary and disagreeable." His position at Stoke, with Mrs. Oliffe laid up, and poor bedridden Mrs. Rogers growing daily weaker and weaker, was not an exhilarating one. Towards the end of September Mrs. Rogers recovered her speech, which had for several years been almost unintelligible, flickered up for two or three days, and then died. She left Mrs. Oliffe joint executrix of her small property with Gray, who describes himself in November, 1758, as "agreeably employed in dividing nothing with an old harridan, who is the spawn of Cerberus and the dragon of Wantley." In January, 1759, Mrs. Oliffe having taken herself off to her native county of Norfolk, Gray closed the house at Stoke-Pogis, and from this time forth only visited that village, which had been his home for nearly twenty years, when he was invited to stay at Stoke House. At the same time, to the distress of Dr. Brown, he ceased to reside at Pembroke, and spent the next three years in London.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BRITISH MUSEUM.—NORTON NICHOLS.

WHEN the Sloane Collection became national property at the death of its founder in 1753, and was incorporated under an act which styled it the British Museum, scholars and antiquaries expected to enter at once upon their inheritance. But a site and a building had to be secured, and, when these were discovered, it took a long while to fit up the commodious galleries of Montagu House. On the 15th of January, 1759, the Museum was thrown open to the public, and amongst the throng of visitors was Gifford, who had settled himself and his household gods close by in Southampton Row, and who for some weeks had been awaiting the official Sesame. He had been seeing something of London society meanwhile—entertained by Lady Carlisle, invited to meet Rousseau, and attending concerts and plays. He gives some account of the performance of Metastasio's *Ciro Riconosciuto*, with Cocchi's agreeable music.

The British Museum he found "indeed a treasure-house. It was at first so crowded that "the corner room in the basement, furnished with a wainscot table and two chairs," was totally inadequate to supply the demand, and in order to be comfortable it was necessary to book a place a fortnight beforehand. This pressure, however, only las

for a very short time; curiosity was excited by the novelty, but quickly languished, and this little room was found quite ample enough to contain the scholars who frequented it. To reach it the intrepid reader had to pass in darkness, like Jonah, through the belly of a whale, from which he emerged into the room of the Keeper of Printed Books, Dr. Peter Templeman, a physician, who had received this responsible post for having translated *Norden's Travels*, and who resigned it, wearily, in 1761, for a more congenial appointment at the Society of Arts. By July, 1759, the rush on the reading-room had entirely subsided, and on the 23d of that month Gray mentions to Mason that there are only five readers that day. These were Gray himself, Dr. Stukeley the antiquary, and three hack-writers who were copying MSS. for hire.

A little later on Gray became an amused witness of those factions which immediately broke out amongst the staff of the British Museum, and which practically lasted until a very few years ago. People who were the diverted or regretful witnesses of dissensions between a late Principal Librarian and the scholars whom he governed may be consoled to learn that things were just as bad in 1759. Dr. Gowin Knight, the first Principal Librarian, a pompous martinet with no pretence to scholarship, made life so impossible to the keepers and assistants that the Museum was completely broken into a servile and a rebellious faction. Gray, moving noiselessly to and fro, noted all this and smiled: "The whole society, trustees and all, are up in arms, like the fellows of a college." Dr. Knight made no concessions; the keepers presently refused to salute him when they passed his window, and Gray and his fellow-readers were at last obliged to make a *détour* every day because Dr. Knight had walled up a passage

in order to annoy the keepers. Meanwhile the trustees were spending 500*l.* a year more than their income, and Gray confidently predicts that before long all the books and the crocodiles and Jonah's whale will be put up at public auction.

At Mr. Jermyn's, in Southampton Row, Bloomsbury Gray was very comfortably settled. It was a cleaner Bloomsbury than we know now, and a brighter. Gray from his bedroom window looked out on a south-west garden-wall covered with flowering jessamine throughout June and July. There had been roses, too, in this London garden. Gray must always have flowers about him, and he trudged down to Covent Garden every day for blue sweet-peas and pinks, scarlet martagon-lilies, double stock and flowering marjoram. His drawing-room looked over Bedford Gardens, and a fine stretch of upland fields crowned at last, against the sky, by the villages of Highgate and Hampstead. St. Giles's was at his back, with many a dirty court and alley, but in front of him again in the morning light there was little but sunshine and greenery and fresh air. He seems to notice nature here on the outskirts of London far more narrowly than at Cambridge, where there are little parenthetical notes, asides to himself, about "fair white flying clouds at nine in the morning" of a July day, or wheelbarrows heaped up with small black cherries on an August afternoon. He bought twenty wattle-nuts for a penny on the 8th of September, and enjoyed a fine perdrigon-plum upon the 4th.

Meanwhile he is working every day at the Museum, feeding upon literary plums and walnuts, searching the original Ledger-book of the Signet, copying Sir Thomas Wyatt's *Defence* and his poems, discovering "several odd things unknown to our historians," and nursing his old favourite



project of a *History of English Poetry*. He spent as a rule four hours a day in the reading-room, this being as much as his very delicate health could bear, for repeated attacks of the gout had made even this amount of motion and cramped repose sometimes very difficult.

On the 23d of September, 1759, poor Lady Cobham, justly believing herself to be dying, summoned Gray down to Stoke House. She was suffering from dropsy, and being in a very depressed condition of mind, desired him not to leave her. He accordingly remained with her three weeks, and then accompanied her and Miss Speed to town, whither Lady Cobham was recommended to come for advice. She still did not wish to part from him, and he stayed until late in November in her house in Hanover Square. He has some picturesque notes of the beautiful old garden at Stoke that autumn, rich with carnations, marigolds, and asters, and with great clusters of white grapes on warm south walls. After watching beside Lady Cobham for some weeks, and finding no reason to anticipate a sudden change in her condition, he returned to his own lodging in Southampton Row, and plunged again into MSS. of Lydgate and Hoccleve.

It was whilst Gray was quietly vegetating in Bloomsbury that an event occurred of which he was quite unconscious, which yet has singularly endeared him to the memory of Englishmen. On the evening of the 12th of September, 1759—whilst Gray, sauntering back from the British Museum to his lodgings, noted that the weather was cloudy, with a south-south-west wind—on the other side of the Atlantic the English forces lay along the river Montmorency, and looked anxiously across at Quebec and at the fateful heights of Abraham. When night-fall came, and before the gallant four thousand obeyed the word of

"*Odes* by Mr. Gray. Φωνάντα συνετοῖσι. Printed at Strawberry Hill for R. and J. Dodsley, in Pall Mall," with an engraving of Walpole's little gimcrack dwelling on the title-page. The two odes have no other titles than Ode I., Ode II.; they form a pamphlet of twenty-one pages, and were sold at one shilling. Small as the volume was, however, it was by no means insignificant, and it achieved a very great success. Garrick and Warburton led the chorus of praise; the famous actor publishing some verses in honour of the odes, the famous critic pronouncing them above the grasp of the public; and this, indeed, was true. In fact, Gray lamented, as most men of genius have had to lament, that the praise he received was not always judicious praise, and therefore of little worth. "The Συνετοῖ," he says, "appear to be still fewer than even I expected." He became, however, a kind of lion. Goldsmith wrote an examination of the *Odes* for the *Monthly Review*. The Cobhams, at Stoke, were very civil, and Mr. and Mrs. Garrick came down there to stay with him; the stiff, prim demeanour of Dr. Hurd melted into smiles and compliments; the *Critical Review* was in raptures, though it mistook the Æolian Lyre for the Harp of Æolus; and at York races sporting peers were heard to discuss the odes in a spirit of bewildered eulogy. Within two months 1300 copies had been sold. Best of all, Miss Speed seemed to understand, and whispered "φωνάντα συνετοῖσι" in the most amiable and sympathetic tones. But Gray could enjoy nothing; several little maladies hung over him, the general wreck of his frail constitution began to be imminent. Meanwhile small things worried him. The great Mr. Fox did not wonder Edward I. could not understand what the Bard was saying, and chuckled at his own wit; young Lord

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PINDARIC ODES.

It is not known at what time Gray resolved on composing poems which should resemble in stanzaic structure the triumphal odes or *epinikia* of Pindar, but it is certain that towards the close of 1754 he completed one such elaborate lyric. On the 26th of December of that year he gave the finishing touches to an "ode in the Greek manner," and sent it from Cambridge to Dr. Wharton, with the remark, "If this be as tedious to you as it is grown to me, I shall be sorry that I sent it you. . . . I desire you would by no means suffer this to be copied, nor even show it, unless to very few, and especially not to mere scholars, that can scan all the measures in Pindar, and say the scholia by heart." Months later Mason was pleading for a copy, but in vain. The poem thrown off so indifferently was that now known to us as *The Progress of Poesy*, and it marked a third and final stage in Gray's poetical development. In the early odes he had written for his contemporaries; in the *Elegy in a Country Church-yard* he had written for all the world; in the Pindaric Odes he was now to write for poets. In the *Elegy* he had dared to leave those trodden paths of phraseology along which the critics of the hour, the quibbling Hurd and Warburtons, could follow him step by step, but his startling felicities had carried his

Gray's thoughts, was visited and described in the notebook. Gray remained for two whole months and more in Dr. Wharton's house at Durham, associating with the Bishop, Dr. Trevor, and having "one of the most beautiful vales in England to walk in, with prospects that change every ten steps, and open something new wherever I turn me, all rude and romantic." It had been proposed that on the return journey he should visit Mason at Hull, but the illness of that gentleman's father prevented this scheme, and the friends met at York instead. Gray travelled southwards for two days with "a Lady Swinburne, a Roman Catholic, not young, that has been much abroad, seen a great deal, knew a great many people, very chatty and communicative, so that I passed my time very well." I regret that the now-living and illustrious descendant of this amusing lady is unable to tell me anything definite of her history.

Gray came back to Cambridge to find the lime-trees changing colour, stayed there one day, and was just preparing to proceed to his London lodgings, when an express summoned him to Stoke, where his aunt, Mrs. Rogers, had suffered a stroke of the palsy. He arrived on the 6th of October, to find everything "resounding with the wood-lark and robin, and the voice of the sparrow heard in the land." His aunt, who was in her seventy-eighth year, had rallied to a surprising degree, and her recovery was not merely temporary. It would seem, from an expression in one of his letters, that his paternal aunt, Mrs. Oliffe, had now gone down from Norwich to Stoke, to live with Mrs. Rogers. I do not remember that the history of literature presents us with the memoirs of any other poet favoured by nature with so many aunts as Gray possessed. Stoke was not a home for Gray with Mrs.

command to steal across the river, General Wolfe, young officer of thirty-three, who was next day to death and immortality in victory, crept along in a boat from post to post to see that all was ready for the expedition. It was a fine, silent evening, and as they pulled along, with muffled oars, the General recited to one of the officers who sat with him in the stern of the boat nearly the whole of Gray's *Elegy in a Country Church-yard*, adding, as he concluded, "I would prefer being the author of that poem to the glory of beating the French to-morrow." Perhaps no finer compliment was ever paid by the man of action to the man of imagination, and, sanctified, as it were, by the dying lips of the great English hero, the poem seems to be raised far above its intrinsic rank in literature and to demand our respect as one of the acknowledged glories of our race and language. This beautiful anecdote of Wolfe rests on the authority of Professor Robison, a mathematician, who was a recruit in the Engineers during the attack upon Quebec, and happened to be present in the boat when the General recited Gray's poem.

Poor Gray, ever pursued by the terrors of arson, had great fright in the last days of November in this year. A fire broke out in the house of an organist on the opposite side of Southampton Row, and the poor householder was burnt to death; the fire spread to the house of Gray's lawyer, who fortunately saved his papers. A few nights later the poet was roused by a conflagration close at hand in Lincoln's Inn Fields. "'Tis strange," he says, in a spirit of desperation, "that we all of us here in town lay ourselves down every night on our funeral pile, ready made and compose ourselves to rest, whilst every drunken fellow man and drowsy old woman has a candle ready to light before the morning." It is rather difficult to know what

even in so pastoral a Bloomsbury, Gray did with a sow, for which he thanks Wharton heartily in April, 1760.

In the spring of this year Gray first met Sterne, who had just made an overwhelming success with *Tristram Shandy*, and who was sitting to Sir Joshua Reynolds. Gray's opinion of Sterne was not entirely unfavourable; the great humorist was polite to him, and his works were not by nature so perplexing to Gray as those of Smollett and Fielding. The poet was interested in Sterne's newly discovered emotion, sensibility, and told Nichols afterwards that in this sort of pathos Sterne never failed; for his wit he had less patience, and frankly disapproved his tittering insinuations. He said that there was good writing and good sense in Sterne's *Sermons*, and spoke of him when he died, in 1768, with some respect. A less famous but pleasanter man, whose acquaintance Gray began to cultivate about this time, was Benjamin Stillingfleet, the Bluestocking.

In April, 1760, Lady Cobham was at last released from her sufferings. She left the whole of her property, 30,000*l.*, to Harriet Speed, besides the house in Hanover Square, plate, jewels, and much blue and white china. Gray tells Wharton darkly that Miss Speed does not know her own mind, but that he knows his. The movements of this odd couple during the summer of 1760 are very dim to us and perplexing. Why they seem associated in some sort of distant intimacy from April to June, why in the latter month they go down together to stay with General Conway and Lady Ailesbury at Park Place, near Henley, and why Lady Carlisle is of the party, these are questions that now can only tantalize us. Gray himself confesses that all the world expected him to marry Miss Speed, and was astonished that Lady Cobham only left him 20*l.* for a

mourning-ring. It seems likely on the whole that, had he been inclined to endow Harriet Speed with his gout, his poverty, his melancholy, and his fitful genius, she would have accepted the responsibility. When she did marry it was not for money or position. He probably, for his part, did not feel so passionately inclined to her as to convince himself that he ought to think of marriage. He put an air of Geminiani to words for her, not very successfully, and he wrote one solitary strain of amatory experience :

“ With beauty, with pleasure surrounded, to languish,  
To weep without knowing the cause of my anguish ;  
To start from short slumbers, and wish for the morning—  
To close my dull eyes when I see it returning ,  
Sighs sudden and frequent, looks ever dejected—  
Words that steal from my tongue, by no meaning connected !  
Ah ! say, fellow-swains, how these symptoms befell me ?  
They smile, but reply not—sure Delia will tell me ! ”

For a month in the summer of 1760 he lived at Park Place, in the company of Miss Speed, Lady Ailesbury, and Lady Carlisle, who laughed from morning to night, and would not allow him to give way to what they called his “sulkiness.” They found him a difficult guest to entertain. Lady Ailesbury told Walpole afterwards that one day, when they went out for a picnic, Gray only opened his lips once, and then merely to say, “ Yes, my lady, I believe so.” His own account shows that his nerves were in a very weary condition. “ Company and cards at home, parties by land and water abroad, and what they call *doing something*, that is, racketing about from morning to night, are occupations, I find, that wear out my spirits, especially in a situation where one might sit still, and be alone with pleasure.” Early in August he escaped to the quietness of Cambridge in the Long Vacation, and after this saw lit-

anger than herself, a Baron de la Feyriere, live at Viry, on the Lake of Geneva. Here, the death of the poet, she received a Mr. Leve into his hands the lines which Gray had written. So ended his one feeble and shadowy ray was not destined to come within the grasp of any woman's devotion, except his mother's. Far apart from the absorbing emotions of humanity to sympathise with, but not to partake of its secondary affections and household pleasures of the annals of friendship he is eminent; he did not tempt fortune by becoming a husband and a father. Here are some beautiful words of Sir Thomas More come before the mind as singularly appropriate: "I never yet cast a true affection on a woman. I have loved my friend, as I do virtue, my friend."

In 1760, there were published anonymously *Two Lines to Obscurity and to Oblivion*, which were addressed to Gray and on Mason respectively. It was not known that this was a salute fired off by that group of satirists from Westminster, of whom Pope, Swift, and Churchill are now the best known. These, indeed, were probably a joint production, but the idea was taken by George Colman (the younger) and Robert Lloyd, gay young wits of twenty-five, who wrote mock odes, in which the manners of Gray were fairly well parodied, attracted a good deal of notice more than they were worth, and the *Monthly Review* invited the poets to reply. But Gray warned them not to do so. Colman was a friend of Garrick, and was an impassioned admirer of Gray himself,



and there was no venom in the verses. Lloyd, indeed, had the *naïveté* to reprint these odes some years afterwards in a volume which bore his name, and which contained a Latin version of the *Elegy in a Country Church-yard*. Lloyd was a figure of no importance, a mere shadow cast before by Churchill.

In 1760 Gray became deeply interested in the *Erse Fragments* of Macpherson, soon to come before the world as the epic of *Ossian*. He corresponded with the young Scotchman of twenty-two, whom he found stupid and ill-educated, and, in Gray's opinion, quite incapable of having invented what he was at this time producing. The elaborate pieces, the narratives of *Cromach*, *Fingal*, and the rest were not at this time thought of, and it seems, on the whole, that the romantic fragments so much admired by the best judges of poetry were genuine. What is interesting to us in Gray's connexion with *Ossian* is partly critical and partly personal. Critically it is very important to see that the romantic tendency of his mind asserted itself at once in the presence of this savage poetry. He quotes certain phrases with high approbation. *Ossian* says of the winds "Their songs are of other worlds:" Gray exclaims, "Did you never observe that pause, as the gust is recollecting itself, and rising upon the ear in a shrill and plaintive note like the swell of an *Æolian* harp? I do assure you there is nothing in the world so like the voice of a spirit." These pieces produced on him just the same effect of exciting and stimulating mystery that had been caused by his meeting with the ballads of *Gil Morice* and *Chevy Chase* in 1757. He began to feel, just as the power of writing verse was leaving him or seemed to be declining, that the deepest chords of his nature as a poet had never yet been struck. From this time forth what little serious

ere all in the direction of what was savage and archaic, the poetry of the precursors of our literature in England and Scotland, the Runic chants of the Scandinavians, the war-songs of the primitive Gaels—everything, in fact, which for a century past had been looked upon as ungentle and incorrect in literature. Personally what is interesting in his introduction to Ossian is his sudden sympathy with men like Adam Smith and David Hume, for whom he had been trained in the school of Warburton and Hurd to cultivate a fanatic hatred. In the summer of 1760 a variety of civilities on the absorbing question of the Erse fragments passed between him and the great historian. Hume had written to a friend: "It gives me pleasure to find that a person of so fine a taste as Mr. Gray approves these fragments, as it may convince us that our fondness of them is not altogether founded on national prepossession;" and Gray was encouraged by this to enter into correspondence of a most friendly kind with the dangerous enemy of orthodoxy. He never quite satisfied himself about Ossian; his last word on that subject is: "For me, I admire nothing but *Fingal*, yet I remain still in doubt about the authenticity of these poems, though inclining rather to believe them genuine in spite of the world. Whether they are the inventions of antiquity or of a modern Scotchman, either case to me is alike unaccountable.

*m'y perds.*" Modern scholarship has really not progressed much nearer to a solution of the puzzle.

Partly at the instance of Mason, Gray took a considerable interest in the exhibition of the Society of Arts at the Adelphi, in 1760. This was the first collection of the kind made in London, and was the nucleus out of which the institution of the Royal Academy sprang. The gen-

ius of this first exhibition was Paul Sandby, a man whom Mason thought he had discovered, and whom he was constantly recommending to Gray. Sandby, afterwards eminent as the first great English water-colour painter, had at this time hardly discovered his vocation, though he was in his thirty-fifth year. He was still designing architecture and making profitless gibes and lampoons against Hogarth. Gray and Mason appear to have drawn his attention to landscape of a romantic order, and in October, 1760, Gray tells Wharton of a great picture in oils, illustrating *The Bard*, with Edward I. in the foreground and Snowdon behind, which Sandby and Mason have concocted together, and which is to be the former's exhibition picture for 1761. Sandby either repeated this subject or took another from the same poem, for there exists a picture of his, without any Edward I., in which the Bard is represented as plunging into the roaring tide, with his lyre in his hand, and Snowdon behind him.

During the winter of 1760 and the spring of 1761 Gray seems to have given his main attention to early English poetry. He worked at the British Museum with indefatigable zeal, copying with his own hand the whole of the very rare 1579 edition of Gawin Douglas's *Palace of Honour*, which he greatly admired, and composing those interesting and learned studies on *Metre* and on the *Poetry of John Lydgate* which Mathias first printed in 1814.

Warburton had placed in his hands a rough sketch which Pope had drawn out of a classification of the British Poets. Pope's knowledge did not go very far, and Gray seems to have first formed the notion of himself writing a History of English Poetry whilst correcting his predecessor's errors. The scheme of his history is one which will probably be followed by the historian of our

y, when such a man arises; Gray proposed to open full examination of the Provençal school, in which w the germ of all the modern poetry of Western Eu- from Provence to France and Italy, and thence to and the transition was to be easy; and it was only bringing up the reader to the mature style of Gower Chaucer that a return was to be made to the native, s, the Anglo-Saxon elements of our literature. Gray a variety of purchases for use in this projected com- on, and according to his MS. account-book he had "finds" which are enough to make the modern bib- niac mad with envy. He gave sixpence each for 587 edition of Golding's *Ovid* and the 1607 edition naer's *Æneid*, whilst the 1550 edition of John Hey- 's *Fables* seems to have been thrown in for nothing, ake up the parcel. Needless to say that, after con- g months and years in preparing materials for his work, Gray never completed or even began it, and in , 1770, learning from Hurd that Thomas Warton was to essay the same labour, he placed all his notes and oranda in Warton's hands. The result, which Gray lived to see, was creditable and valuable, and even s not entirely antiquated; it was very different, how- from what the world would have had every right to t from Gray's learning, taste, and method. o short poems composed in the course of 1761 next nd our attention. The first is a sketch of Gray's own cter, which was found in one of his note-books:

o poor for a bribe, and too proud to importune,  
 had not the method of making a fortune;  
 uld love, and could hate, so was thought somewhat odd;  
 very great wit, he believed in a God;  
 post or a pension he did not desire,  
 t left Church and State to Charles Townshend and Squire."

It has been commonly supposed that these lines suggested to Goldsmith his character of Burke in *Retaliation*. Charles Townshend is the famous statesman, surnamed the Weathercock; the Rev. Samuel Squire was much more obscure, an intriguing Fellow of a Cambridge college who had just contrived to wriggle into the bishopric of St. David's. Warburton said that Squire "made religion his trade." At the storming of Belleisle, June 13, 1761, Sir William Williams, a young soldier with whom Gray was slightly acquainted, was killed, and the Montagus, who proposed to erect a monument to him, applied to Gray for an epitaph. After considerable difficulty, in August of that year, Gray contrived to squeeze out three of his stately quatrains. Walpole describes Williams as "a gallant and ambitious young man, who had devoted himself to war and politics," and to whom Frederic Montagu was warmly attached. Gray, however, expresses no strong personal feeling, and did not, indeed, know much of the subject of his elegy. It is curious that in a letter to Dr. Brown, dated October 23, 1760, Gray mentions that Sir W. Williams is starting on the expedition that proved fatal to him, and predicts that he "may lay his fine Vandyck head in the dust."

For two years Gray had kept his rooms at Cambridge locked up, except during the Long Vacation, but in the early spring of 1761 he began to think of returning to what was really home for him. He ran down for a few days in January, but found Cambridge too cold, and told Dr. Brown not to expect him till the codlin hedge at Pembroke was out in blossom. Business, however, delayed him, against his will, until June, when he settled in college. In September he came up again to London to be present at the coronation of George III., on which occa-

accommodated with a place in the Lord Chamberlain's Guard of the Honourable Household. "The Bishop of Rochester would have been sworn in if it had not been pinned to the cushion. The Bishop was often obliged to call out, and set out the sword of state had been entirely wanting. Huntingdon was forced to carry the Lord Chamberlain's sword instead of it. This made a great show before they got under their canopies. I should have told you that the old Duke of Devonshire, with his stick, went doddling by the Queen, and the Bishop of Chester had the Queen's ring the gold paten. When they were down to dinner, for there were three rooms. The Duke of Devonshire was so good as to set out cold sirloins of beef, legs of mutton, fillets of veal, other substantial viands and liquors, which were served up giggledy-piggledy, like porters; after which they were served up again, and seated themselves." In 1761 Gray was curiously excited by the appearance of Mr. Delaval, a former Fellow of Trinity College, bringing with him a set of musical glasses. He writes, on the 8th of December:

"I am to Cambridge out of hand, for here is Mr. Delaval with a set of glasses that sing like nightingales; and he will be here every other night, and shall stay here this month. A great deal of good company, and a whale in pickle just arrived; and the man will not die, and Mr. Wood is gone. There is nobody but you and Tom and the curled wig. I am at the charge, for we will make a subscription; and you always come when you have a mind."

Gray, probably during one of his flying visits to Cambridge, had a young fellow introduced to him, who was at that time to have taken no notice,

but who was to become the most intimate and valued of his friends. No person has left so clear and circumstantial an account of the appearance, conduct, and sayings of Gray as the Rev. Norton Nichols, of Blandeston, in 1760 an undergraduate at Trinity Hall, and between eighteen and nineteen years of age. Nichols afterwards told Mathias that the lightning brightness of Gray's eye was what struck him most in his first impression, and he used the phrase "*fulgorante sguardo*" to express what he meant. A little later than this, at a social gathering in the rooms of a Mr. Lobbs, at Peterhouse, Nichols formed one of a party who collected round Gray's chair and listened to his bright conversation. The young man was too modest to join in the talk, until, in reply to something that had been said on the use of bold metaphors in poetry, Gray quoted Milton's "The sun to me is dark, and silent as the moon;" upon this Nichols ventured to ask whether this might not possibly be imitated from Dante, "*Mi ripingeva la dove il sol tace.*" Gray turned quickly round and said, "Sir, do you read Dante?" and immediately entered into conversation with him. He found Nichols an intelligent and sympathetic student of literature; he chiefly addressed him through the remainder of the evening; and when they came to part he pressed him to visit him in his own rooms at Pembroke.

Gray had never forgotten the Italian which he had learned in his youth, and he was deeply read in Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso, whilst disdaining those popular poets of the eighteenth century who at that time enjoyed more consideration in their native land than the great classics of the country. One of his proofs of favour to his young friend Nichols was to lend him his marked and annotated copy of Petrarch; and he was pleased

was the first to trace in the *Purgatorio* the suggested a phrase in the *Elegy in a Country*

It was doubtless with a side-glance at his condition of genius that he told Nichols that it "an advantage to Dante to have been in a rude age of strong and uncontrolled passion. The Muse was not checked by refinement and criticism." For the next three years we must see him as constantly cheered by the sympathy and encouragement of young Nichols, though it is not until 1764 that we receive upon the first of the invaluable letters ever received from his great friend.

Life could be more humdrum than Gray's existence in London. There is no sign of literary life in him, and the year 1762 seems only broken by a journey to the country in the summer. Towards the end of June he went to York for a fortnight with Mason, whose "avarice," as Gray calls it in writing to him, was "checked for a little while by the office of Residentary Chaplain at the Cathedral. Mason was now grown lazy and indolent, "like a Japanese divinity, with his hands full of a fat belly," and so prosperous that Gray exhorted him to "shut his insatiable repining mouth." He was in a good-humour about Mason, and under the influence of his friend he does not seem to have shown any great exertion. From York Gray went on to Durham, and then to Wharfedale at Old Park, where he was extremely idle, taking in no newspaper or magazine, but the pleasures of the country are beyond compare." He made a long journey late in the autumn set out for a tour in Scotland with himself. Through driving rain he saw what he called the "Richmond" and of Ripon, but was fortunate enough to secure some gleams of sunshine for an exami-



nation of Fountains Abbey. At Sheffield, then pastoral and pretty still, he admired the charming situation of the town, and so came at last to Chatsworth and Hardwicke, at which latter place "one would think Mary Queen of Scots was but just walked down into the park with her guard for half an hour." After passing through Chesterfield and Mansfield, Gray descended the Trent, spent two or three days at Nottingham, and came up to London by the coach.

He arrived to find letters awaiting him, and a great pothole. Dr. Shallet Turner, of Peterhouse, Professor of Modern History and Modern Languages at Cambridge, had been dead a fortnight, and Gray's friends were very anxious to secure the vacant post for him. The chair had been founded by George I. in 1724, and the stipend was 400*l*. It was not expected that any lectures should be given; as a matter of fact, not one lecture was delivered until after Gray's death. Shallet Turner had succeeded Samuel Harris, the first professor, in 1735, and had held the sinecure for twenty-seven years. Gray's friends encouraged him to think that Lord Bute would look favourably on his claims, partly because of his fame as a poet, and partly because Bute's creature, Sir Henry Erskine, was a great friend of Gray's; but Sir Francis Blake Delaval had in the mean time secured the interest of the Duke of Newcastle for his own kinsman. Early in November it was generally reported that Delaval had been appointed, but a month later the post was actually given to Lawrence Brockett, of Trinity, who held it until 1768, when he was succeeded by Gray. This is the only occasion upon which the poet, in an age when the most greedy and open demands for promotion were considered in no way dishonourable, persuaded his haughty and independent spirit to

thing; in this one case he gave way to the  
s of a crowd of friends, who declared that he  
out out his hand and take the fruit that was  
p into it.

ing of 1763 Gray was recalled to the pursuit  
by the chance that a friend of his, a Mr.  
embroke, whilst travelling in Italy, met the  
itic and commentator Count Francesco Alga-  
m he presented Gray's poems. The Count  
with rapturous admiration, and passed them on  
g poet Agostino Paradisi, with a recommen-  
he should translate them into Italian. The  
f Algarotti was then a European one, and Gray  
ch flattered at the graceful and ardent com-  
o famous a connoisseur. "I was not born so  
sun," he says, in a letter dated February 17,  
be ignorant of Count Algarotti's name and  
nor am I so far advanced in years, or in phi-  
ot to feel the warmth of his approbation. The  
tion, as their motto shows, were meant to be  
*intelligent alone*. How few *they* were in my  
Mr. Howe can testify; and yet my ambition  
ed by that small circle. I have good reason  
if my voice has reached the ear and appre-  
stranger, distinguished as one of the best  
rope." Algarotti replied that England, which  
enjoyed a Homer, an Archimedes, a Demos-  
possessed a Pindar also, and enclosed "ob-  
at is, panegyrics," on the *Odes*. For some  
correspondence of Count Algarotti enlivened  
gness" of Gray's history at Cambridge—"a  
ys, "where no events grow, though we pre-  
f former days by way of *hortus siccus* in our

libraries." In November, 1763, the Count announced his intention of visiting England, where he proposed to publish a magnificent edition of his own works; Gray seems to have anticipated pleasure from his company, but Algarotti never came, and soon died rather unexpectedly, in Italy, on the 24th of May, 1764, at the age of fifty-two.

We possess some of the notes which Gray took of the habits of flowers and birds, thus anticipating the charming observations of Gilbert White. At Cambridge, in 1763, crocus and hepatica were blossoming through the snow in the college garden on the 12th of February; nine days later brought the first white butterfly; on the 5th of March Gray heard the thrush sing, and on the 8th the skylark. The same warm day which brought the lark opened the blossom-buds of the apricots, and the almond-trees for once found themselves outrun in the race of spring. These notes show the quickness of Gray's eye and his quiet ways. It is only the silent, clear-sighted man that knows on what day the first fall of lady-birds is seen, or observes the redstart sitting on her eggs. Gray's notes for the spring of 1763 read like fragments of a beautiful poem, and are scarcely less articulate than that little trill of improvised song which Norton Nichols has preserved—

"There pipes the wood-lark, and the song-thrush there  
Scatters his loose notes in the waste of air"—

a couplet which Gray made one spring morning as Nichols and he were walking in the fields in the neighbourhood of Cambridge.

To this period should be attributed the one section of Gray's poems which it is impossible to date with exactness, namely, the romantic lyrics paraphrased, in short

es, from Icelandic and Gaelic sources.<sup>1</sup> When pieces were published, in 1768, Gray prefixed to an "advertisement," which was not reprinted. In the connected them with his projected *History of the Poetry*. "In the introduction" to that work, he meant to have produced some specimens of the style designed in ancient times amongst the neighbouring nations, or those who had subdued the greater part of the island, and were only progenitors: the following imitations made a part of them." The three imitations are *The Fatal Sisters*, *The Descent of Odin*, and *The Triumphs of Owen*. To these must be added the fragments, *The Death of Hoel*, *Caradoc*, and *Conscor*, discovered amongst Gray's papers, and first printed in 1761. These, then, form a division of Gray's poetical work not inconsiderable in extent, remarkably homogeneous in style and substance, and entirely distinct from anything else which he wrote. In these paraphrases of the old chants he appears as a purely romantic poet, and in the approach of Sir Walter Scott, and the whole of Northern romance. The Norse pieces are, perhaps more interesting than the Celtic; they are longer, and modern scholarship seem more authentic, at all events more in the general current of literature. Moreover, they were translated direct from the Icelandic, so that there is no absolute proof that Gray was a scholar. It may well inspire us with admiration for the poet's intellectual energy to find that he had mastered a language which was hardly known, at that time, anywhere in Europe, except a few learned Icelanders, whose native tongue made it easy for them to understand the original. It is to be noticed that *The Fatal Sisters* and *The Descent of Odin* bear the date 1761 in the Pembroke MSS.

Norœna. Gray must have puzzled it out for himself, probably with the help of the *Index Linguae Scytho-Scandicæ* of Verelius. At that time what he rightly calls the Norse tongue was looked upon as a sort of mystery; it was called "Runick," and its roots were supposed to be derived from the Hebrew. *The Fatal Sisters* is a lay of the eleventh century, the text of which Gray found in one of the compilations of Torfæus (Thormod Torveson), a great collector of ancient Icelandic vellums at the close of the seventeenth century. It is a monologue, sung by one of the Valkyriur, or Choosers of the Slain, to her three sisters; the measure is one of great force and fire, an alternate rhyming of seven-syllable lines, of which this is a specimen:

"Now the storm begins to lower  
 (Haste, the loom of Hell prepare!):  
 Iron-sleet of arrowy shower  
 Hurbles in the darkened air.  
 . . . . .  
 "Ere the ruddy sun be set  
 Pikes must shiver, javelins sing,  
 Blade with clattering buckler meet,  
 Hauberk crash, and helmet ring.  
 . . . . .  
 "Sisters, hence with spurs of speed;  
 Each her thundering falchion wield;  
 Each bestride her sable steed—  
 Hurry, hurry to the field!"

*The Descent of Odin* is a finer poem, better paraphrased. Gray found the original in a book by Bartolinus, one of the five great physicians of that name who flourished in Denmark during the seventeenth century. The poem itself is the *Vegtamskvida*, one of the most powerful and mysterious of those ancient lays which

t collection we possess of Scandinavian  
 probable that Gray never saw the tolerably  
 y inaccurate edition of *Sæmundar Edda*  
 n his time, nor knew the wonderful his-  
 lection, which was discovered in Iceland,  
 ynjólfur Sveinnson, Bishop of Skálaholt.

Gray found in Bartolinus, however, was  
 to enable him to make a better transla-  
*stamskvida* than any which has been at-  
 nd to make us deeply regret that he did  
 more of these noble Eddaic chants. He  
 philological ingenuity, for, finding that  
 his true nature from the Völva, calls  
 Gray translates this strange word "trav-  
 tracing it to *veg*, a way. He omits the  
 n recounts how the Æsir sat in council to  
 ne dreams of Balder, and he also omits  
 anzas, in this showing a critical tact little  
 ous, considering the condition of scholar-  
 e. The version itself is as poetical as it

t against the eastern gate,  
 ne moss-grown pile he sate,  
 re long of yore to sleep was laid  
 dust of the prophetic maid.  
 ng to the Northern clime,  
 ce he traced the Runic rhyme;  
 ce pronounced, in accents dread,  
 thrilling verse that wakes the dead;  
 from out the hollow ground  
 ly breathed a sullen sound."

Mantling in the goblet see  
 The pure beverage of the bee;

O'er it hangs the shield of gold ;  
'Tis the drink of Balder bold,  
Balder's head to death is given.  
Pain can reach the sons of Heaven !  
Unwilling I my lips unclose—  
Leave me, leave me to repose—"

must be compared with the original to show how thoroughly the terse and rapid evolution of the strange old lay has been preserved, though the concise expression has throughout been modernized and rendered intelligible.

In these short pieces we see the beginning of that return to old Norse themes which has been carried so far and so brilliantly by later poets. It is a very curious thing that Gray in this anticipated, not merely his own countrymen, but the Scandinavians themselves. The first poems in which a Danish poet showed any intelligent appreciation of his national mythology and history were the *Rolf Krake* and *Balder's Dod* of Johannes Ewald, published respectively in 1770 and 1773. Gray, therefore, takes the precedence not only of Sir Walter Scott, Mr. Morris, and other British poets, but even of the countless Danish, Swedish, and German writers who for a century past have celebrated the adventures of the archaic heroes of their race.

In a century which was inclined to begin the history of English poetry with the Life of Cowley, and which distrusted all that was ancient, as being certainly rude and probably worthless, Gray held the opinion, which he expresses in a letter of the 17th of February, 1763, "that, without any respect of climates, imagination reigns in all nascent societies of men, where the necessities of life force every one to think and act much for himself." This critical temper attracted him to the *Edda*, made him indul-

and led him to see more poetry in the  
of Wales than most non-Celtic readers can

In 1764 Evans published his *Specimens*  
y, and in that bulky quarto Gray met with  
translation of the chant, written about 1158  
in praise of his master, Owen Gwynedd.  
s gave a variety of extracts from the Welsh  
*Yn*, and three of these fragments Gray  
English rhyme. One has something of the  
epigram from the Greek mythology :

"Have ye seen the tusky boar,  
Or the bull, with sullen roar,  
On surrounding foes advance?  
So Caradoc bore his lance."

are not nearly equal in poetical merit to  
an paraphrases. Gray does not seem to  
ese romances to his friends with the same  
he displayed on other occasions. From  
d and Warburton he could expect no ap-  
s taken from an antique civilisation. Wal-  
not see these poems till they were printed,  
an care through what horrors a Runic sav-  
all the joys and glories they could conceive  
felicity of boozing ale out of the skull of  
din's Hall?" This is quite a characteristic  
that wonderful eighteenth century through  
ay wandered in a life-long exile. The au-  
*tamskvida* a "Runic savage!" No wonder  
Imitations" safely out of the sight of such



## CHAPTER VIII.

### LIFE AT CAMBRIDGE.—ENGLISH TRAVELS.

THE seven remaining years of Gray's life were even less eventful than those which we have already examined. In November, 1763, he began to find that a complaint which had long troubled him, the result of failing constitution, had become almost constant. For eight or nine months he was an acute sufferer, until in July, 1764, he consented to undergo the operation without which he could not have continued to live. Dr. Wharton volunteered to come up from Durham, and, if not to perform the act, to support his friend in "the perilous hour." But Gray preferred that the Cambridge surgeon should attend him, and the operation was not only performed successfully, but the poet was able to sustain the much-dreaded suffering with fortitude. As he was beginning to get about again the gout came in one foot, "but so tame you might have stroked it, such a minikin you might have played with it; in three or four days it had disappeared." This gout, which troubled him so constantly, and was fatal to him at last, was hereditary, and not caused by any excess in eating or drinking; Gray was, in fact, singularly abstemious, and it was one of the accusations of his enemies that he affected to be so dainty that he could touch nothing less delicate than apricot marmalade.

Whilst Gray was lying ill Lord Chancellor Hardwicke at the age of seventy-four, on the 16th of May, . The office of Seneschal of the University was thus sed, and there ensued a very violent contest, and the t of which was that Philip Hardwicke succeeded to father's honours by a majority of one, and the other idate, the notorious John, Earl of Sandwich, though orted by the aged Dr. Roger Long and other clerical mates, was rejected. Gray, to whom the tarnished ration of Lord Sandwich was in the highest degree rrent, swelled the storm of electioneering by a lam- , *The Candidate*, beginning :

"When sly Jemmy Twitcher had smugged up his face,  
With a lick of court white-wash and pious grimace,  
A-wooing he went, where three sisters of old  
In harmless society guttle and scold."

Lord Sandwich found that this squib was not without instant and practical effect, and he attempted to win dangerous an opponent to his side. What means he hated cannot be conjectured, but they were unsuccessful.

Sandwich said to Cradock, "I have my private reason for knowing Gray's absolute inveteracy." *The Candidate* found its way into print long after Gray's death, only in a fragmentary form; and the same has hitherto been true of *Tophet*, of which I am able to give, for the first time, a complete text from the Pembroke MSS. of Gray's particular friends, "placid Mr. Tyson of 't College," made a drawing of the Rev. Henry Topham, a converted Jew, a man of slanderous and violent temper, who had climbed into high preferment in the Church of England. Underneath this very rude and gross caricature Gray wrote these lines :

"Thus Tophet look'd: so grinn'd the brawling fiend,  
Whilst frighted prelates bow'd and call'd him friend;  
I saw them bow, and, while they wish'd him dead,  
With servile simper nod the mitred head.  
Our mother-church, with half-averted sight,  
Blush'd as she bless'd her grisly proselyte;  
Hosannas rang through hell's tremendous borders,  
And Satan's self had thoughts of taking orders."

These two pieces, however, are very far from being the only effusions of the kind which Gray wrote. Mason appears to have made a collection of Gray's Cambridge squibs, which he did not venture to print. *A Satire upon Heads; or, Never a Barrel the Better Herring*, a comic piece in which Gray attacked the prominent heads of houses, was in existence as late as 1854, but has never been printed, and has evaded my careful search. These squibs are said to have been widely circulated in Cambridge—so widely as to frighten the timid poet, and to have been retained as part of the tradition of Pembroke common-room until long after Gray's death. I am told that Mason's set of copies of these poems, of which I have seen a list, turned up, during the present century, in the library of a cathedral in the North of England. This may give some clue to their ultimate discovery. They might prove to be coarse and slight; they could not fail to be biographically interesting.

In October, 1764, Gray set out upon what he called his "Lilliputian travels" in the South of England. He went down by Winchester to Southampton, stayed there some weeks, and then returned to London by Salisbury, Wilton, Amesbury, and Stonehenge. "I proceed to tell you," he says to Norton Nichols, "that my health is much improved by the sea; not that I drank it, or bathed in it, as

people do. No! I only walked by it and in it." His description of Netley Abbey, in a letter to Mr. Brown, is very delicate: "It stands in a little dell, which gradually rises behind the ruins into a hill crowned with thick wood. Before it, on a detached thicket of oaks, that serves to veil it from the sea, and from profane eyes, only leaving a peep on the water where the sea appears glittering through the trees and vessels, with their white sails, glide across and in. . . . I should tell you that the ferryman told me, a lusty young fellow, told me that he had for all the world, pass a night at the Abbey, and seen such things as were seen near it." Still more picturesque, showing an eye for nature which was not a precedent in modern literature—is this in a letter of this time to Norton Nichols:

Do not close my letter without giving you one principal story; which was, that (in the course of my late tour) the morning before five o'clock, the moon shining through the misty autumnal air, and got to the sea-coast time enough to see the sun's levée. I saw the clouds and dark vapours open right and left, rolling over one another in great smoky billows, the tide (as it flowed gently in upon the sands) first slightly tinged with gold and blue; and all at once an insufferable brightness that (before I can write these words) has grown to half an orb, and now to a whole one, too distinctly seen. It is very odd it makes no figure on my wall, I shall remember it as long as the sun, or at least as long as I live. I wonder whether anybody ever saw it before? I shall tell you of it."

Mr. Gray was laid up again with illness, and ended this time with blindness, a calamity which ended off favourably. He celebrated the death of Mr. Gray which occurred at this time, by writing what